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Illegitimate Celebrity in the British Long Eighteenth Century

Melissa Wehler

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ILLEGITIMATE CELEBRITY IN THE BRITISH LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Melissa Wehler

May 2013

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Melissa A. Wehler

2013

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Approved March 22, 2013

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ABSTRACT

ILLEGITIMATE CELEBRITY IN THE BRITISH LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By

Melissa Wehler

May 2013

Dissertation Supervised by Professor Laura Engel

In the discussions about contemporary celebrities, the femme fatale, the bad boy, the child star, and the wannabe have become accepted and even celebrated figures. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, actors and actresses who challenged acceptable strategies for celebrity behavior were often punished by exile, debt, disgrace, and humiliation. Some performers even faced a veritable textual and historical oblivion. *Illegitimate Celebrity* considers the careers of Dorothy Jordan, William Henry West Betty, Edmund Kean, and Margaret Agnes Bunn, and offers a historical genealogy of “illegitimate” performers who dared to break with social convention and struggled to define and redefine themselves according to strict social codes that dictated their behavior both onstage and off. By examining celebrity productions, portraits, caricatures, and performances as elements to producing celebrity, I

demonstrate how the audiences used these public figures to create complex narratives regarding class, femininity, masculinity, marriage, nationalism, among others.

Ultimately, the study of illegitimate celebrity reveals the role of celebrity in shaping these discursive structures and provides an important history for modern narratives regarding the role of celebrity in society.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my own Great Illegitimates!!

David, Kathy, Nikki, Adam, and Matthew

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I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the McAnulty College and Graduate School for awarding me the 2011-2012 Dissertation Fellowship. The College's funding of the project was invaluable to its completion.

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Introduction

In the scandalous tell-all biography about the eighteenth-century comedic genius Dorothy Jordan, *The Great Illegitimates!! Public and private life of that celebrated actress, Miss Bland, otherwise Mrs. Ford, or, Mrs. Jordan; Late Mistress of H. R. H. the D. of Clarence; now King William IV., Founder of the Fitzclarence Family*, a “confidential friend of the departed” frames the actress’ personal and private affairs through the lens of illegitimacy.¹ The term “Great Illegitimates” most likely refers to Jordan’s unwieldy brood of illegitimate children who numbered fourteen in total. However, the “greatness” of Jordan’s illegitimate children refers not only to their number, but also to their social status. By the time this sensational biography was published, many of Jordan’s children had become *great* lords and ladies, baronesses and viscountesses, admirals and generals, which meant that the bastard progeny of a working-

¹ The author readily admits the biographies’ histrionic intent: “In sketching the present biography, it is our task to arouse feelings diametrically opposed to each other: we shall touch, as it were, the several chords of the human heart, and awaken every thrill—its vibrations alternately sounding to pleasure and to pain” (5).

class Irish actress were largely overseeing the social, political, and marital well being of the British empire.

The “greatness” of these illegitimates, of course, was the result of their mother and how her celebrity status garnered her attention from another set of “great illegitimates”: her lovers. The “friend of the departed” lists the various names under which the actress had performed including “Mrs. Ford”—an allusion to Richard Ford, a prominent member of parliament—and the Duke of Clarence—Jordan’s most well-known and controversial suitor and also the father of ten of her fourteen children. Much like the “greatness” of her children, Jordan’s illegitimate lovers were great because of their number—she was linked to three prominent men including Ford and the Duke—and because of their prestigious social and political positions. The author’s conscious decision to frame Jordan through her “illegitimates” positions her as the literal and metaphorical mother of illegitimacy: not only does she engage in illegitimate affairs with “great” men, but she literally reproduces that illegitimacy through her children. The fact that these lovers and offspring eventually become social and political heavyweights means that unlike other illegitimate mothers, Jordan’s “great” illegitimacy is not only her own burden, but also the burden of the state and the empire.

Beyond the rather salacious marketing strategy, *The Great Illegitimates!!!* provides an interesting insight into the ways late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century audiences viewed celebrity figures through moral, ethical, and even legal paradigms. The author of the scandalous biography makes a conscious decision to define the actress through her familial and sexual entanglements rather than her theatrical work. This “confidential friend” frames these relationships as “illegitimate,” suggesting that

nineteenth-century readers were interested in the scandalous personal lives of their favorite celebrity figures; that these sensational biographies were interested in questions of legitimacy and illegitimacy as they relate to issues of celebrity, femininity, sexuality, and maternity; and that illegitimacy, whether personal or professional, was an interesting and pertinent lens through which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society viewed, judged, and understood those figures in the public eye.

Illegitimate Celebrity explores the ways in which audiences of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used “illegitimacy” as a way of organizing and understanding the developing celebrity culture and how this term was variously applied as a moral accusation, subversive praise, and deviant categorization. By examining specific celebrity profiles from the period commonly referred to as Romanticism, this study answers the following questions: what is illegitimacy in its historical context and how is it applied to celebrity figures? Does the application of the term differ according to the celebrity’s gender, age, nationality, or class? How does the term illegitimacy help us to better understand the role of celebrity during the period traditionally defined as Romanticism? How do eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences use the term illegitimacy in relation to maternity, sexuality, gender, class, nationality, age, and desire? What does the term “illegitimate” tell us about other issues in celebrity studies, namely the creation and retention of public intimacy? What can studying biographic profiles tell us about audiences and audience’s reception of the developing celebrity culture? To answer these questions, we need to situate illegitimacy in its historical and linguistic contexts.

0.1 Rakes to Gentlemen Turned: Illegitimacy and the Historical Context

In the late eighteenth century, theatrical players had to work against popular stereotypes: actors were rakish men or impotent homosexuals; actresses were sexually depraved women and wanton whores.² Long-held myths about professional players abided, and they were often treated as no better than servants, rogues, and even criminals.³ The class discrepancy between players and patrons also contributed to such stereotypes. A celebrated theatrical figure could be humbled, or in some cases, “put in their place,” by a not-so-gentle reminder of the less-than-genteel history of their profession. The threat of illegitimacy, therefore, was one method of keeping star performers deferential to their aristocratic patrons. The latent threat of illegitimacy worked to keep a potentially influential theatre culture from gaining too much legitimacy, and by extension, power over their aristocratic counterparts.

In response, many professional players adhered to the same social mores that dictated the behavior of their aristocratic counterparts. Players from the late seventeenth century through the mid-eighteenth century, including Thomas Betterton (c.1635-1710), Anne Oldfield (1683–1730), Catherine “Kitty” Clive (1711-1785), Hannah Pritchard (1711–1768), David Garrick (1717–1779), and Frances “Fanny” Abington (1737–1815), worked to professionalize the image of the player and cultivate a congruent paradigm of celebrity, resulting in the gentlemanly and gentlewomanly celebrity who was gracious, regal, and above all, polite. Of the friends Clive and Pritchard, for instance, it was said that they shared

² For more on stereotypes of actors as homosexuals, see Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, pgs. 47-68. For more on stereotypes of actresses as prostitutes, see Howe chapter six; and Pullen pgs. 1-22.

³ Straub has referred to this phenomenon as the “discourse of containment” (*Body Guards* 146).

the same downright honesty of purpose, the same frank outspokenness, the same lusty independence that flew to arms at the slightest hint of oppression. They shared the same ambitions and worked for the same ends, and when the time came for them to end their labour, both could look back without a shadow of regret and say that it had been well done. (Simpson and Braun 89)

Theatrical celebrities like Clive and Pritchard often tried to combat the inherent illegitimacy associated with their profession by appearing to the public as models of unassailable “honesty.”⁴ In doing so, they balanced themselves between legitimacy and illegitimacy, or in other words, between having power and being powerless.

Illegitimate Celebrity considers the careers of Dorothy Jordan, William Henry West Betty, and Edmund Kean and how these performers worked within and against the paradigm of the gentlemanly and gentlewomanly player established by their successful predecessors from the so-called Age of Garrick who dominated the stage from the 1740s to the 1760s.⁵ While the last great actors and actresses of this generation left their places in the 1760s, the fourth generation did not take full possession of the stage until the early 1780s: George Frederick Cooke in 1778, Mary Wells in 1781, Sarah Siddons in 1782, John Philip Kemble in 1783, and Dorothy Jordan in 1785. The Age of Garrick gave way

⁴ Of course, as many theatrical and critical histories of the period have demonstrated, this was not always the case. Many celebrities outright rebuked the attempt to gentrify the acting profession. Actresses, such as Margaret “Peg” Woffington and George Anne Bellamy, and actors such as Colley Cibber and Charles Macklin were constantly associated with private and public scandals.

⁵ Before the dawn of the 1770s, however, these luminaries had largely vacated the boards either through death—Woffington collapsed during a performance in 1757 and died three years later; Susannah Cibber died in 1766; and Pritchard met a rather untimely end after a horse riding accident in 1768—or by retiring—Garrick officially retired in 1766; and Clive in 1769. There were some third generation actors and actresses who managed to survive the rather turbulent decade. George Ann Bellamy, for instance, made her last appearance at Drury Lane in 1785 and Charles Macklin only retired in 1789.

to the Age of Siddons who along with her brother, “Glorious” John Kemble, reigned over London, albeit tentatively, until an upstart named Edmund Kean first found success at Drury Lane in 1814.

By examining celebrity productions, portraits, caricatures, and performances as elements of the celebrity persona, *Illegitimate Celebrity* demonstrates how the audiences used celebrities to create complex narratives regarding class, femininity, masculinity, marriage, nationalism, among others. Emphasizing the importance of reading celebrities vis-à-vis these discursive structures, I lay bare the ways in which celebrities became repositories for—and often examples of—systematic beliefs within the period. This project does not assume completeness in its scope or inclusivity in its subject matter, but rather offers an in-depth analysis of the ways individual actors and actresses were interpreted and reinterpreted by the public during a specific historical moment.

Illegitimate Celebrity is informed by literary criticism, performance theory, and feminist theory and uses primary materials such as letters, memoirs, press statements, plays, portraits, and caricatures to develop narratives regarding a celebrity’s public persona. Using these frameworks, I suggest that narratives of celebrity—constructed by both the actor and the public—are never static, but rather shift in response to fluid definitions of social, political, and moral legitimacy and illegitimacy. Through these materials, the project is able to demonstrate the importance of individual actors and actresses, their relationship to the public, and what these relationships can reveal to modern theorists, historians, and scholars about the discursive systems in the Romantic era. Ultimately, I argue that shifts in defining a celebrity as legitimate or not offer us

insights into debates about class and morality; actors, actresses, and theatre culture; and politics, monarchs, and nationalism.

0.2 Illegitimate Studies: Celebrity Studies as a Critical History

Illegitimate Celebrity also examines the relationship between individual celebrity figures and the London public in the Romantic-era and contributes to a developing discussion about celebrity in the public sphere at this time. Celebrity during this period has been examined by a number of literary critics, historians, theater theorists, and scholars including Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History*, Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody's *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000*, and Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Cultural and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* and *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850*. Mole's definition of celebrity as "an individual, an industry, and an audience" (*Byron's Romantic Celebrity* 1) has been particularly helpful in guiding the following discussion. Like Mole, this project uses a poststructuralist approach to demonstrating the dynamic and versatile nature of celebrity beyond an idiosyncratic construct of the individual. *Illegitimate Celebrity* has also benefitted from the work by cultural theorists such as David P. Marshall in *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, Joseph Roach in *It*, Chris Rojek in *Celebrity*, and Graeme Turner in *Understanding Celebrity* who have discussed the function of celebrity in the public sphere. Marshall's theorization of celebrity as a *system* and Rojeck's poststructuralist analysis of celebrity have both been particularly helpful to guiding my theorization of celebrity as a kind of repository for cultural attitudes. In addition to these literary and cultural studies, studies that examine celebrity images have become integral to understanding the ways these figures are interpreted and reinterpreted

within the period's discursive systems. Studies such as Laura Engel's *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making*, Gill Perry's *Spectacular Flirtations*, Kristina Straub's *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology*, and Shearer West's *The Image of The Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* offer frameworks for examining the ways celebrities' images circulate in the public spheres.

Illegitimate Celebrity draws on these and other significant projects to offer a new approach to studying celebrity figures during what has been called the Age of Celebrity. As a theoretical term, *illegitimacy* has been applied most often in its legal context. Epistemologically, to be illegitimate means to be "not legitimate," but more specifically, although still abstractly, illegitimacy refers to someone or something that is "not in accordance with or authorized by law; unauthorized, unwarranted; spurious; irregular, improper" (*OED*). Illegitimacy has its roots as a legal status and refers to the state of being unlawful: "not born in lawful wedlock; not recognized by law as lawful offspring; spurious, bastard" (*OED*). It can also refer to a governing body's ability to render that status: "to declare or pronounce illegitimate; to bastardize" (*OED*). To pronounce someone as illegitimate, or to bastardize, is to declare that the subject no longer conforms to society's rules nor is sanctioned by society's laws.

Thus, when Jane Moody employs the term illegitimate to describe the theatre circuit in London from 1770-1840, she does so using the legal connotation of the word. In *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, Moody traces the tension between the patent, or authorized theatres and the minor, or unauthorized, theatres. She discusses that the emergence of these minor theatres challenge the hegemony of the patent theatres by

producing unauthorized productions of comedy and tragedy and suggests that the “politics and iconography of illegitimacy underpin Romantic playwriting and theatrical criticism” (4). Looking at these unauthorized productions, Moody incorporates a subsequent definition of illegitimacy based on taste distinctions. In dramatic terms, legitimate refers to plays “that have theatrical and literary merit”—the *OED* mentions Shakespeare specifically—while illegitimate plays are “more concerned with spectacle than with literary quality.” The dramatic connotation of illegitimacy is especially integral to Moody’s final chapter on Joseph Grimaldi and Edmund Kean, where Moody applies the term illegitimacy to the unauthorized nature of performances: Grimaldi’s career in pantomime and Kean’s re-visioning of Shakespearean characters. *Illegitimate Celebrity* borrows the application of this term as a label for period celebrities who engage in what were considered transgressive behaviors. However, unlike Moody’s study of illegal theatre productions, this project explores the ways celebrities were either vilified or admired by the public for engaging in what were considered illegitimate activities and lifestyles and how illegitimacy itself became a tradable commodity for both the celebrity and the media.

The association between illegitimacy and transgression has been a particularly important theoretical framework in critical feminist texts from the period. Most notably, Katharine Kittredge’s collection, *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century*, parses out the idea of transgression as it relates to the perception of women and women’s behavior throughout the eighteenth century. In her introduction, Kittredge offers the following explanation as to how and why transgression played an important role in defining women in the eighteenth century:

There is terror in transgression. Women, especially, understand that once they have moved outside society's behavioral/sexual boundaries, there will be no return and no alternative place of safety. Like all particularly effective horrors, the alienation that follows transgression gains power because it cannot be clearly seen: the boundaries of acceptable behavior shift over time, place, and circumstance; and the dangers that lie "beyond" are unspoken. (1)

In both the introduction and the following essays, the collection examines the idea of "lewd" and "notorious" with the assumption that being outside the dominant discourses has power and agency. It is also important to note that Kittredge applies the term "transgression" only to women and the actions women take against a patriarchal system, meaning that transgression and illegitimacy are primarily feminine and that men and even male children work to keep this patriarchal system oppressive towards women.

While I agree with Moody's and Kittredge's assessments of illegitimacy as a source of transformation, I question whether illegitimacy's transformative agency resides solely in the negation of established hierarchies and authorities. In this project, I demonstrate how ideas of legitimacy and illegitimacy inform and revise each other through a mutual co-existence. Linguistically, this appears obvious: legitimacy is epistemologically dependent on the definition of an "unauthorized, unwarranted, irregular, and improper" other. By illegitimizing someone, therefore, society forces marginalized members to exist outside norms, boundaries, laws, and spaces in order to create a recognizable other. It is no surprise, given illegitimacy's verb-form, that a definition of monstrosity is also associated with the term: legitimacy means to "conformity to rule or principle" while illegitimacy means to exhibit some elements that

are “naturally or physiologically abnormal” (OED). These physiological abnormalities can manifest as a questionable mental state: in logic, legitimacy refers to “conformity to sound reasoning” and it stands that illegitimacy can be viewed as departure from sound reasoning. Thus, when defined in conjunction with legitimacy, illegitimacy describes the social, legal, physiological, and mental other: a monstrous, devolved form of what is authorized, warranted, regular, and proper. Without illegitimacy and its attenuating otherness, legitimacy lacks agency. In such a scenario, everyone and everything is authorized, warranted, regular, and proper. It is through the tension provided by its contrary dialectical opposite that legitimacy serves its authoritative and ultimately divisive purpose. Illegitimacy, as the very word implies, is not necessarily independent from—and thus contrary to—legitimacy. In *Illegitimate Celebrity*, I would like to call attention to the ways Romantic-era audiences associated celebrities like Jordan, Betty, and Kean with what on the surface appear to be contrary narratives regarding their illegitimacy. To do so, we need to further examine the role of post-structuralism in celebrity studies.

As celebrity studies continues to evolve in the scholarly discourse, definitions of and approaches to celebrity are continually and rapidly changing, and the current study is certainly not immune to these processes. This study certainly hopes to complicate an already complicated discussion of celebrity in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—a period that was itself undergoing rapid and paradigmatic shifts in the definition of “celebrity.” Despite the complexity of modern and historical debates over what constitutes a celebrity, many modern scholars have offered definitions for parsing out this historic and linguistic debate. Perhaps most helpfully, Cheryl Wanko offers a

broad definition of celebrity from her recent critical history of celebrity studies. When defining celebrity, Wanko refers to the “celebrity object” or the primary “text” of celebrity scholarship, which can include physical objects, celebrity referents, and social media: “the celebrity object is someone known mainly via the media circulation of his/her textual and/or visual images, which are minimally controlled by their human referents, necessarily multivalent to embody multiple cultural desires and fears, and absorbed by a cultural machinery that uses, multiplies, reinforces and modifies those images” (351). In defining the current state of celebrity studies, Wanko describes “Scholars of celebrity can study an object, the celebrity him or herself, but they must also examine the conditions enabling celebrity” (351). The emphatic connotation of “must” in Wanko’s definition of the field, I believe, reveals the current professional bias towards a poststructuralist approach in celebrity studies, and it is this bias that I would like to explore further since post-structuralism is certainly the underpinning for the current study.

In broad terms, the function of post-structuralism in celebrity studies is to unearth, explore, and understand the historical, social, and political mechanizations that elevate certain public figures over others. In this study, post-structuralism is defined as associative identity creation that occurs as a result of these mechanizations. The role of associative identity creation is certainly not an unexplored field within celebrity studies. Both Joseph Roach and Laura Engel have used Marvin Carlson’s “ghosting” phenomenon to describe and define the mechanizations driving celebrity. Roach describes his theory on the celebrity “after-image” as an extension of Carlson’s “ghosting” phenomenon, arguing that such associations “need not end with the retirement

or death of the star” (6), but instead live on through the collective memory of the public. Like Roach, Laura Engel has also applied the concept of ghosting to celebrity figure by defining celebrity as “the degree of impact of the actor’s haunting aftereffect on his or her audiences” (6). These associative identities are also explored to great effect in Roach’s *It*.

In Roach’s study, the theatre theorist and historian discusses the phenomenon of celebrity allure known colloquial as “It.” Looking at the qualities that comprise this essential and abstract allure, Roach determines that to have “It” means to possess the contrary—not contradictory—elements of attraction and repulsion. He explains the paradox inherent in having It by comparing the celebrity phenomena with the children’s game of the same name:

the player ritually chosen to be ‘it’ is simultaneously elected and ostracized.

There is a kind of freakishness to having It; and despite the allure, a potential for monstrosity, which haunts the meaning of it as the proper neuter pronoun of the third-person singular, used to refer to things without life, of animals when sex is not specified, and sometimes infants. (Roach 11)

Having “It,” as Roach rightfully emphasizes, is not always glamorous, appealing, or even desirable. Being a celebrity often means being exposed, ostracized, and othered in ways that uncomfortable, embarrassing, and even hateful. The intrinsic discordance of having “It” is crystalized in Roach’s concept of public intimacy, which is defined as upholding “the illusion availability” while still remaining elusive (3). The illusionary and elusive nature of “It” renders the celebrity an absent other: they are always present through their absence. Audiences view celebrities as no more tangible then their objectified presence:

images, productions, and objects, and in many ways, these absent substitutions become more “real” to their audiences than the “real” celebrity. The result is that audience create a celebrity’s identity through the objects they are most closely associated.

Like Roach, Felicity Nussbaum grapples with the concept of public intimacy, specifically as it pertained to mid-eighteenth-century actresses. In *Rival Queens*, Nussbaum offers discusses what she refers to as the “interiority effect” or the attempt of theatre and theatre professionals to “compete with other nascent forms reflective of inwardness—such as the epistolary novel, the periodical, and autobiographical writing—in fostering and revealing a sense of individuality and intimacy” (19). As Nussbaum discusses throughout project, it is important to emphasis the *effective* nature of celebrity interior: a celebrity’s interior is merely an impression of individual subjectivity and not the “real” subjective itself. She specifically references the actress “Kitty” Clive who “created an illusion of coherent identity or an “interiority effect” that referred, not to a preexisting ‘real’ person or a to a fixed and knowable identity, but to a fabrication of self” (152). For Clive and other actresses, the effected subjectivity is the real commodity that is sold to the audience and that has actual value in the marketplace.

While *Illegitimate Celebrity* focuses on a different generation of players and considers the careers of both actors and actresses, Nussbaum’s theorization of the interiority effect and its value as a tradable commodity provides another avenue to discussing and describing the intangible relationship between celebrity and marketplace, and like Nussbaum, the current project seeks to understand how certain celebrities brokered relationships with a public who increasing demanded access to the personal lives of their beloved public figures.

Using theoretical concepts like ghosting, othering, public intimacy, and interiority *Illegitimate Celebrity* explores the ways eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences used associative identity creation to view, assess, and understand the developing celebrity culture at the end of the eighteenth century. To do so, the current study necessarily examines the cultural mechanisms that enable celebrity and argues that for many spectators, celebrities—especially ones who were at any time labeled as “illegitimate”—acted as a type of repository for the attitudes, ideas, and beliefs about issues as varied as gender, sexuality, marriage, maternity, nationality, class, desire, and age. As a result, the current study builds on the poststructuralist ideas of ghosting, othering, and public intimacy by expanding their application and definition.

This expansion is probably most apparent in the application of public intimacy as a social rather than individual concept. Rather than suggesting how individual celebrities create an intimacy with the public, this study suggests how the public shapes and constructs this intimacy for itself, far beyond the desires or intentions of the celebrity-object. By reframing the object/subject of public intimacy, the celebrity-as-repository approach deconstructs the ways audiences viewed celebrity figures at a time when definitions about celebrities and their place in society were rapidly changing.

By examining the usage of “repository,” we can better define the idea that celebrities function as a type of social repository. A now rare use of repository referred to “A person to whom confidential information is entrusted, a confidant (now rare); (in later use also) a person in whom trust or confidence is placed, a trusty,” or “A person, place, or thing regarded as a store or fund of something immaterial, as knowledge, authority, etc.” (*OED*). The cultural authority entrusted to celebrity figures—the

underlying desire for them to act as role models and social and political ambassadors—certainly qualifies them as a human “repository,” and that they “store or fund something immaterial” is certainly reminiscent of Roach’s “It” quality, but to truly explore the celebrity-as-repository, we must seek out the word’s other and perhaps more interesting possibilities.

In addition to people, repositories can refer to a place or receptacle in which things are or may be deposited, esp. for storage or safe keeping” or “building in which interesting artefacts, works of art, etc., are gathered for display, a museum” (*OED*). As public figures, celebrities act as “storage” for public beliefs and opinions and their public “display” serves to reinforce the qualities that made them famous. Moreover, the choice of celebrity—who is elevated and who is not—acts as a type of public barometer for acceptability. Thus, failed celebrities—a topic explored in the epilogue—tell us just as much about the appetite for certain celebrity qualities as do their successful counterparts.

In addition to their storage and display qualities, repositories also have a spiritual capacity: “A place in which a person is put to rest,” “A place in which souls reside or are held (before or after life),” and “A place in which a dead body is deposited; a vault, a sepulchre; a tomb.” While this project will discuss at length the entombing and excavating of celebrities and their reputations, this definition also calls to mind the theoretical threads of mortality and resurrection in Carlson’s and Roach’s discussion of “ghosting” as well as Engel’s discussion of the “haunted” celebrity. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in the eighteenth century, a repository was also another name for a prison: “a place for the (typically temporary) detention of debtors or criminals.” In the context of this study, this final definition of repository offers not only an interesting

counterpoint to the “trust and confidence” definition of repository, but also suggests how the concept of illegitimacy lurks within the public trust. Repositories, by their nature, keep unwanted people in or out; they are both available and unavailable; and they both rely on having or abusing the public trust. Like repositories, the function of celebrity is to elevate desirable persons over undesirable ones; be constantly present and absent to their admirers; and must balance between being too sensational and not sensational enough. Thus, by examining how celebrities function as social repositories, we can better understand why the celebrities in question behave and misbehave according to the expectations of their audiences.

By suggesting that actors and actresses are living repositories for social identity-making, however, is in no way to argue that celebrities are passive subjects who did nothing to shape public opinion or inform the public’s understanding of their subjectivity. Recent work by scholars such as Laura Engel, Felicity Nussbaum, Cheryl Wanko, and Shearer West, among others, have persuasively argued that actors and actresses were actively working to create and market their public images by through the available medias, which included appearing in certain roles, sitting for particular artists, and writing their own memoirs, and my argument here is necessarily in a dialogue with these works. Building on these valuable foundations, the current study explores other mechanisms that enable the creation of celebrity such as critical and artistic receptions and audience analysis.

By examining how celebrities become living repositories for social identity making, I first engage with and build from these arguments that situate the celebrity-individual as the primary-creator of identity. Building from the celebrity-individual

discussed by Engel, Nussbaum, Wanko, West, and others, my argument looks at the ways these self-fashioned narratives are interpreted, revised, and recapitulated according the secondary-creator of identity: the public. Thus, broadly speaking, *Illegitimate Celebrity* works to contribute to the ongoing construction of “celebrity” by complicating established characteristics and expanding its parameters to include multiple agents involved in identity creation.

The questions posed by such a study necessarily demand that certain assumptions about celebrity need to be reexamined. First, this project seeks to question the absolutist theorization of illegitimacy as either a positive, transgressive agency or a negative, powerless position. As we will see, illegitimacy operates as these forces often simultaneously, providing both intrigue and damnation from the public. In fact, these case studies suggest that even if some celebrities can translate their illegitimacy into a profitable commodity, many more are socially, politically, and economically crippled by being viewed as a transgressor. Second, the case studies suggest that while celebrities necessarily cultivate a public intimacy, such a relationship is neither inherently positive nor commercially lucrative. The celebrities discussed here all suffer from being overexposed to their audiences in ways that are embarrassing, scandalous, or manipulative. Rather than take a strictly positivist or defeatist attitude toward celebrity behavior, *Illegitimate Celebrity* considers how celebrities challenged accepted narratives about gender, class, ethnicity, political affiliation, and nationality, and often failed to conform to their audience’s expectations of how they should conduct themselves as public persons.

Changing ideas of propriety coupled with changing attitudes towards privacy meant that the personal worlds of favorite performers were now acceptable fodder for a public who was eager to watch performers struggle to define and redefine themselves according to strict social codes that dictate their behavior. For audiences in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, theatrical celebrities became both physical and metaphorical sites where questions about “legitimate” behaviors were written, challenged, and revised. Individual actors and actresses became symbols for the greatest debates in their world—marriage, femininity, monarchy, masculinity, patriotism, empire, sexuality, and desire—and audiences watched how their beloved icons navigated the changing social landscape eager to challenge, praise, condemn, and exonerate those “illegitimates” that managed to ultimately test the boundaries of acceptability without losing either their interest or their reputation.

0.3 My Illegitimates: Dorothy Jordan, Edmund Kean, and William Henry West Betty

My interest in looking at the performers from the Romantic-era has two-fold purpose. The first is methodological. Because I am examining the ways actors and actresses moved between models of legitimate and illegitimate celebrity behavior, my project necessarily assumes that these models have not only been established, but have also been accepted as legitimate and illegitimate. The process of creating, maintaining, and establishing models of self-presentation would then require some historical distance from those first, second, and even third generations of actors and actresses who were producing such models. My secondary purpose for limiting my argument to this generation of actors and actresses is historical. The fourth and fifth generation of British actors and actresses faced a social, political, and cultural landscape that while similar in

many ways to their predecessors, they faced significant changes to the ways celebrities presented and re-presented themselves to their audiences and the ways their audiences interpreted and reinterpreted those celebrity-individuals in light of larger historical shifts.

The individual performers whose case studies account for the majority of the project were selected according to three criteria: historical period, celebrity status, and questionable reputation. First, Jordan, Betty, and Kean all fall within the historical period generally referred to as the Romantic era. While Jordan certainly bridges the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century, she debuts in 1785 and reaches the height of her fame at the traditional beginning of the Romantic era in 1789.⁶ I chose this particular historical period because of its unique relationship to questions of what is legitimate and what is illegitimate. As the British struggled with ideas of legitimacy and illegitimacy on both macro and micro scales, they began to question the authority of established institutions and ideas whether those questions referred to power of monarchs and salience of governments; the definition of nationalism and national identity; the inherent superiority of the landed gentry; the preeminence of rational thought and enlightenment philosophy; the importance of classical art such as drawing and music; and the subjugation of the imagination in literature.

Second, potential celebrities were vetted according to their celebrity status, which I defined as an overwhelming media presence in the form of reviews, critiques, portraits, caricatures, and biographies. Jordan and Kean were certainly two of the most obvious

⁶Of course, the term “Romanticism” as well as the dating of the period have always been and continue to be an area of much critical debate. In this case, I defer my own delineation of the period to M. H. Abrams who dates the beginning of period in 1789 from *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* published in 1973 since many contemporary scholars use his date as the basis for their own counterarguments.

choices since their reviews span decades, their biographies and critical texts number in the dozens, and scholars have continually viewed them as part of important celebrity canon at the end of the eighteenth century.⁷ Betty, conversely, provides a more interesting problem to the celebrity status issue since his career only spanned three years. Of course, in those three years, he developed a rabid cult following, became the subject of more than a dozen artistic renderings, and received overwhelming praise by critical and popular audiences.⁸ The saturating presence of these three public figures suggests that their contemporaries view them as uniquely separate and inherently different from their peers, and therefore, worthy of particular celebration. In other words, Jordan, Kean, and Betty were products of a mass media system that constantly reproduced the image of celebrities for consumption for a popular audience.

The final quality, questionable reputation, was determined through a performer's reputation for scandal or the insinuation of scandalous behavior and activities either on their part or on the part of their audiences, and each chapter deals with the question of reputation, scandal, and illegitimacy at length. The perception of scandal or scandalous behavior suggests that much of what audiences understand about an individual celebrity is filtered through the lens of legitimacy or illegitimacy. The celebrities in question either built their reputations on the perception of illegitimacy or had their careers destroyed by the implication of it. Jordan, Kean, and Betty were all the subjects of a mass-media machine whose purpose was to sensationalize the lives and careers of

⁷Kean has been recently discussed by Jacky Bratton in "The Celebrity of Edmund Kean: An Institutional Story" while Jordan has been discussed most recently by Gill Perry in "Staging Gender and "Hairy Signs": Representing Dorothy Jordan's Curls."

⁸Betty's celebrity status is the subject of an entire study by Jeffery Kahan entitled, *Bettymania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture*.

celebrated public figures in order to increase subscriptions and revenue.

In choosing subjects for the current project, I looked at several factors such as the existence and wealth of a critical and scholarly discussion to determine my scope. Certainly, the criteria for the study could also define additional celebrities from the period including Sarah Siddons, Mary Robinson, Lord Byron, and others. My decision for not including these figures was two-fold. First, contemporary scholars have explored celebrity figures like Siddons, Robinson, and Byron in comprehensive studies while the three figures under discussion here have received very little critical analysis in comparison. Thus, the current project attempts to build on the scholarly materials already existent on the three subjects while also providing new insights and methodologies into examining these three celebrity figures. Second, I decided to focus on depth of analysis rather than breadth, and in doing so, necessarily limited my discussion to three case studies. While a broad analysis of illegitimacy and celebrity in the Romantic period would yield interesting conclusions, such an endeavor is well beyond the scope of this project. By choosing to focus on these three celebrities, the current project is able to explore the issue of illegitimacy with particular attention to how ideas about legitimacy and illegitimacy shift and change during a performer's career. Thus, while several additional celebrities could have been included in the project, focusing on three celebrities who lack the comprehensive critical discussion offers new avenues and new subjects for the greater discussion in celebrity studies.

0.4 Illegitimate Subjects: Chapter Summaries

The first chapter, "The Naturally Unnatural Dorothy Jordan," examines how the public perception of a celebrity can change over a course of celebrity's lifetime and how

the perception of illegitimacy can undermine an otherwise acclaimed career. To do so, I examine a variety of biographical texts both historical and contemporary as well as personal letters, theatre reviews, and first-hand descriptions. The first half of the chapter discusses portraits of Jordan as the “child of nature,” a figure in-line with accepted narratives about feminine behavior in the late eighteenth century. These highbrow images attempted to legitimize her theatrical celebrity and elevate the comedic actress as a worthy rival to great female tragedian, Sarah Siddons. The second half contrasts these “legitimate” depictions of Jordan’s celebrity with caricatures that satirize Jordan’s affair with the Duke of Clarence who would become the future King of England. The affair with the Duke symbolized a catastrophic disruption in the public’s expectation of the actress as the “child of nature.” By contrasting Jordan’s reputation as the “child of nature” at the beginning of her career with the caricatures of the actress after her public affair with the Duke of Clarence, this chapter examines how celebrities become metaphorical repositories for the public’s ideas about marriage, maternity, sex, and gender.

In the second chapter, “I-doll-ized: William Henry West Betty and the Appeal of Thingness,” I examine the inherent illegitimacy attached to the figure of the child celebrity and the public’s desire for young people’s bodies. The chapter examines the various definitions and states of being idolized and suggests that the process of “i-doll-ization,” or the transformation from subject to object, helps to justify and mediate the potentially negative and illegitimate desires aroused by the young celebrity’s body. I explore contemporary and historical biographies, first-hand accounts, diary entries, and theatre reviews that discussed Betty’s performances both on and off stage. In addition to

these accounts, I also analyze the numerous prints, portraits, and caricatures that attempted to capture his “boyish” charm. By turning Betty from a living, breathing subject into a static, usable object, audiences were able to mitigate their own questionable attractions. The chapter also describes how Betty, or more specifically his managerial staff, encouraged his “thingness” by making him appear doll-like. This section of the chapter examines the kinds of emperma surrounding celebrity figures such as prints, commemorative coins, and figurines. In so doing, this chapter suggests ways celebrities and audiences alike manipulated the idea of illegitimacy by transforming taboo subjects and desires into acceptable objects and attractions.

The third chapter, “Edmund Kean’s Monstrous Celebrity,” discusses Kean’s conscious construction of himself as the “bad boy” celebrity. The first half of the chapter looks at the ways Kean successfully turns the figure of the legitimate celebrity inside out and becomes the first commercially successful celebrity to capitalize on his illegitimate persona. I compare his attempt to cultivate himself as a roguish figure with the less successful George Frederick Cooke, Kean’s most tragic predecessor. For this half of the chapter, I rely heavily on biographical accounts for both actors including historical and contemporary accounts, letters, diaries, and theatre reviews. The second half of the chapter focuses on Kean’s failure to maintain an illegitimate position in the theatrical or public sphere by tracing his two transatlantic journeys; his subsequent rejection in America; his criminal-conversation lawsuit; and his ultimate fall from fame. In this half of the chapter, my analysis focuses on American and British accounts of his tour, theatre reviews, and caricatures. By demonstrating how Kean is “haunted” by Cooke’s undying

influence, the chapter examines how illegitimacy can be both commercially successful and professionally devastating.

Finally, the epilogue, “The Madwoman in the Wings: The Case of Mrs. Bunn,” examines the failed celebrity Mrs. Margaret Agnes Bunn, an actress who had all the markers of a celebrity including exposure, talent, and marketing, but who failed to capture the public’s imagination. To do so, I dissect numerous historical and contemporary biographies and histories of minor actresses in an effort to piece together a narrative of her personal and professional lives. The epilogue posits several factors contributing to her failed celebrity, including her male and female rivalries, her unpopular husband, her association with madwomen characters, and the declined production of her successful dramas. The case of Bunn sheds some light on how and why some promising performers fail and how the even perception or threat of illegitimacy can have a devastating effect on an individual’s ability to achieve lasting fame.

0.5 An Illegitimate Future

The concept and construction of illegitimacy as applied to celebrities is certainly not specific to the Romantic era performers discussed in this project, and certainly, modern audiences can extrapolate a kind of informal trajectory from the narratives of these nineteenth-century performers to our modern-day celebrities. The “types” of illegitimate celebrity first manifested by these actors and actresses are certainly relevant to modern celebrity theory. Modern theatre critic, David Román, unsurprisingly begins his genealogy of celebrity in the eighteenth-century with Sarah Siddons and traces her influence to performances by the iconic Bette Davis and Charles Pierce, a renowned drag queen and performer. Like Román’s genealogy, the celebrity types discussed here—the

femme fatale, the bad boy, the child star, and the wannabe—all have their modern counterparts. Discussions about the continued viability of celebrities who conform to these once transgressive scripts showcase the need for celebrities to reinvent themselves: celebrities fear type-casting as much as audiences abhor it.

Chapter One: The Naturally Unnatural Dorothy Jordan

In *Lubber's-Hole*, —alias—*The Crack'd Jordan* (1791), the famed eighteenth-century caricaturist, James Gillray, presents a nightmarish scene wherein a large, cracked chamber pot with legs is being entered by a rather portly man in stripped, red pants. While eighteenth-century viewers might be prone to read the caricature as an example of absurdist art, eighteenth-century audiences would have been able to decode the social, political, and sexual allusions buried under the layers of Gillray's precise signifiers. The large chamber pot with legs would have been immediately recognizable as an allusion to the famed comedic actress, Dorothy Jordan, whose surname was a popular colloquialism for the personal toilet. The man entering the chamber pot's large "crack," signified by his red-stripped naval pants, was none other than the Duke of Clarence, Jordan's lover and George III's third son. The entire piece was a comment on the affair between the beautiful, popular comedic actress and the rather awkward son of the King. Meant to foreground the sexually grotesque nature of Jordan and the Duke's affair, Gillray's *The*

Lubber's Hole used the image of the chamber pot, portrayed as cracked and overflowing with excrement, as a signifier for the Jordan's body and presumed sexual excess. Such "pot" shots at the actress reveal what I believe was a growing dissatisfaction with public figures like Jordan who seemed to flaunt their untraditional lifestyles while simultaneously contributing to what conservative viewers saw as a culture of depravity.

Looking at Jordan's affair with the Duke through caricature, I want to suggest how celebrities become a repository for the social, political, and sexual discourses of eighteenth-century culture. To observe this process, I want to re-examine the phenomena first described by Joseph Roach as public intimacy. According to Roach, public intimacy is the "illusion of availability," or the idea that celebrities appear available to their audiences. But what happens if that illusion becomes a reality? How does unmitigated access to the personal, private, and intimate change an audience's relationship to a celebrity object? Does more access create more intimacy or, as I suspect, does more access to a celebrity create more distance? Using the caricatures surrounding the Jordan affair, I want to suggest how increased access to the Jordan's private life turned the once-beloved celebrity-object into a grotesque, lewd, and monstrous version of her former public self.⁹ By forcing the private into the public in a process I am calling intimacy-in-public, audiences are granted unrestricted access to the celebrity-object.

Jordan's public and untraditional lifestyle has long made her a subject of interest in feminist and theatrical circles, and to this end, several valuable studies on Jordan and

⁹Wanko defines the "celebrity-object" as "someone known mainly via the media circulation of his/her textual and/or visual images, which are minimally controlled by their celebrity references, necessarily multivalent to embody multiple cultural desires and fears, and absorbed by a cultural machinery that uses, multiplies, reinforces, and modifies those images" (342).

her position within the long eighteenth century have already been produced. Gill Perry has re-examined the ways in which has examined Jordan's breeches roles and what they suggest about Jordan's position within these highly demarcated standards of female behavior but, unlike Marsden, suggests that the popular images of Jordan undermine the potentially subversive elements of these roles. Comparing Jordan's portraits to those of Sarah Siddons, Jonathan Bate has argued that such depictions had subtle political allusions regarding not only the reputation of comedy and tragedy, but also about the actresses involved.

While Perry and Bate have examined Jordan's untraditional lifestyle and potentially subversive career through theatrical roles and portraiture, there has been little critical attention paid to the ways Jordan's celebrity image was created through lowbrow art, specifically through caricatures. Caricaturists worked to exposed the personal flaws and indiscretions of the celebrity-object in order to reveal what they believed to be "the truth" about a celebrity-object. This essay surveys caricatures of Jordan by caricaturists such as Isaac and George Cruikshank, Dent, and Gillray from 1791 when her affair with the Duke first became public until 1812, when Jordan starts to recede from public scrutiny. By surveying a variety of artists from over two decades, I want to draw attention to how Jordan's affair with the Duke fundamentally changed Jordan's celebrity image and to suggest how intimacy-in-public retains its position of primacy in the public's consciousness long after a particular scandal has subsided. In looking at the ways caricaturists force Jordan's intimate moments into the public eye, I examine how Jordan as a celebrity-object functions as a repository for the cultural meaning-making and

her position in eighteenth and nineteenth-century narratives about actresses, femininity, celebrity and the theatre.

1.1 The Highbrow Celebrity: Jordan and the Portraitists

Born Dorothy Bland in 1761, Dorothy Jordan would become a sensation of the late eighteenth-century stage. Jordan's mother, Grace Phillips, never married her father, Francis Bland, in an official ceremony, but they did live together as husband and wife. Their relationship ended in 1774 when Jordan's father left to marry an Irish heiress, Catherine Mahoney (Highfill 8.247).¹⁰ With meager financial support from her former lover, Jordan's mother put the young girl on the stage to help support the family. Jordan's mother, herself a once-promising actress, used her connections to get the young girl an audition with Thomas Ryder, an Irish actor and the manager of Crow Street Theatre, Dublin, who Jordan worked for in the 1779-1780 season.¹¹ But Jordan would not stay in Ryder's company for long. Richard Daly, Ryder's rival in the Dublin theatre scene, "had more in his power, or promised more" to the young actress, and within a few months, she became part of his theatre troupe and stayed with him from 1781-1782 (Boaden 1.7).

¹⁰Jordan's biographers have included, Boaden, *The Life of Mrs. Jordan* (1831) in two volumes; Blackburne, *Illustrious Irishwomen* (1877); Jerrod, *The Story of Dorothy Jordan* (1914); Skinner, *Mad Folk* (1928); Tomlin, *Mrs. Jordan's Profession* (1995); Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary* (1991). While all accounts agree about the identities of Jordan's parents, Jordan's biographers differ widely about her father's profession (he apparently billed himself as a "gentleman") and about the status of his relationship with Jordan's mother, Grace. Due to these discrepancies, I have decided to recount what appears to be the consensus from their sources.

¹¹Ryder was the manager of the theatre from 1776, when he acquired it from William Dawson, to 1779, when he surrendered it to Richard Daly (*Oxford Companion Irish Literature* "Crow Street Theatre").

While Daly could offer her more exposure than Ryder, Daly also posed a greater threat to her personal and professional development. Apparently, Daly was something of a gallant, having taken several lovers among the members of his theatre company, and he his sights were now set on the young Jordan. Whether Jordan resisted Daly's efforts or not, the young girl was in an untenable position all too common for an actress of the day: "a manager may be somewhat modified by the danger of offending one who has the power to appoint them to parts, either striking or otherwise, and who must not be irritated, if he cannot be obliged" (Boaden 1.11). Before Jordan's mother could extricate her daughter from this increasingly problematic relationship, she discovered that the young girl was pregnant and the child was Daly's. While having a child out of wedlock was certainly unorthodox by popular standards, it was not necessarily uncommon for eighteenth-century female performers to have multiple lovers.¹²

The pregnancy prompted Jordan's mother to take her daughter to England in 1782 where she could secure better auditions for her growing family and remove Jordan from Daly's influence. Once in England, Jordan toured in the Yorkshire circuit under the name of "Jordan" until coming to London in 1785 where she secured a place at Drury Lane.¹³ Jordan became involved with Richard Ford, a member of parliament, and had

¹²Earlier in the century, Susannah Cibber (1714-1766), Margaret "Peg" Woffington (1720-1760), George Ann Bellamy (1727-1788), and Elizabeth Farren (1759-1829) were all caught in scandalous extra-martial affairs. Jordan's contemporary, Mary Robinson (1757-1800), had a very public affair with the Prince of Wales.

¹³Until joining Tate Wilkinson in Yorkshire in 1782, Jordan had acted under her father's name, "Bland," and her mother's, "Francis," but fearing repercussions from her father's relatives and confusion about which "Francis" would be on stage, they decided to change her name. Wilkinson offered the surname of "Jordan," an apparent allusion to the river Jordan since the actress had to cross the channel between Ireland and England.

several children by him before breaking off the affair to be with the Duke of Clarence. After her relationship with the Duke became public, however, Jordan became the target of moralistic critics. Jordan's biographer, Clare Jerrold, writes about the double standard for actresses in general and Jordan in particular: "If the articles in *The Bon Ton, Town and Country* and kindred magazines may be credited, there were many high-born ladies at the period, who were wives and mothers and yet notorious for the looseness of their morals, and compared with whom Dorothy was a good and respectable woman, yet they went free of the reformer's biting words; but, then, an actress was but a vagabond, after all, and, as Dorothy often proved, could be thrashed with impunity for the sins of the world" (260). As Jerrold suggests, Jordan became a symbol of the decadence of the age. While many others were equally as guilty of the sins of which she was accused, Jordan took the brunt of the critics' sharpened pens.

Before her liaison with the Duke, contemporaries were quick to place Jordan in conversation with narratives that championed female chastity, dependence, domesticity, and marriage by referring to her as "the child of nature." Jordan's reputation as the "natural" woman was first forged through the critical reviews of her performances, and reviewers and artists took advantage of popular narratives about women as both created from and connected to the natural world. Jordan's supposed child-like appearance reinforced such readings of her person, and helped to make her, according to George Carey Saville, "the world approved" and rightful "favourite" for the part of "the child of nature."¹⁴ Critics, such as William Hazlitt, responded to Jordan's more emotive style,

¹⁴ Writing to *The Morning Post* in the fall of 1788, Saville disagrees with the casting of Anne Brunton because, he argues, there is only one "child of nature": "*The Child of Nature* is at Drury Lane./Yet am I

calling her the “child of nature” and praising her comedic acting as “a cordial to the heart, because it came from it, rich, full, like the luscious juice of the rich grape; to hear whose laugh was to drink nectar; whose smile ‘made a sunshine,’ not ‘in the shady place’” (162). Like Hazlitt, William Macready praised the actress for her “spirit of fun that would have outlaughed Puck himself” and her ability to make “all appear spontaneous and accidental, though elaborated with the greatest care” (63).

Jordan’s “naturalness” was often described as a particularly feminine trait for while such “heartiness” can be found in Jordan’s male counterparts. One of the actress’ earliest biographers, James Boaden, reminiscences about the actress since heartiness:

Mrs. Jordan was the genuine thing itself, and that she imitated at all never obtruded itself for a moment upon her audience. There was a heartiness in her enjoyment, a sincerity in her laugh, that sunk the actress in the woman; she seemed only to exhibit herself and her own wild fancies, and utter the impromptus of the moment. (1:19)

Boaden’s description offers two important qualities to understanding the “natural” actress: authenticity and spontaneity. For Jordan’s “sincerity,” drives the spontaneity of her performance and the spontaneity of her performance reinforces its sincerity. Like Boaden, Leigh Hunt was particularly smitten with Jordan’s ability to perform her parts with authenticity and spontaneity. However, Hunt believes that Jordan’s “nature” is able to transform “heartiness” rather than reinforce it. According to Hunt, “heartiness” is predominantly masculine position whereas in female performers “it is naturally softened in a female, it becomes a charming openness mingled with the most artless vivacity [...]

pleased with thy prolific Muse,/Nor would I wish to check thy rising fame,/Nature thought fit a favourite to choose,/The world approved, and Jordan is her name” (qtd. in Jerrold 122).

Mrs. Jordan seems to speak with all her soul: her voice pregnant with melody, delights the ear with a peculiar and exquisite fullness” (80). For Hunt, Jordan’s “charming openness” was a particularly feminine trait and the a direct counterpoint to the more masculine “heartiness.” Moreover, Hunt suggests that it is women’s authenticity, or their ability to be “artless,” that brings them closer to “nature.” Charles Lamb, for instance, champions Jordan’s link to artless “nature” even when the actress was cross-dressing: “There is no giving an account how she delivered the disguised story of her love for Orsino. It was no set speech, that she had foreseen, so as to weave it into an harmonious period, line necessarily following line, to make up the music—yet I have hear it so spoken, or rather read, not without its grace and beauty” (2:151). Jordan’s feminine connection to nature is so profound, according to Lamb, that even when she is attempting to deceive her audience, her natural “grace and beauty” aroused tender, feminine feelings. Descriptions like these helped to undercut the possible taint of impropriety inherent in the professional and largely attached to actresses of the time. The language used in eighteenth-century reviews to emphatically link her to this idealized and almost primitive version of “natural” femininity where also echoed in the portraits of the actress.

Jordan’s popular reputation was created in no small part by the images of the actress painted by some of the most fashionable portraitists of the day. Portraitists such as John William Beechey in *Mrs. Jordan as Rosalind* (1787) and George Romney in *Mrs. Jordan as Peggy in “The Country Girl”* (1788) portrayed Jordan as a defenseless and defensible woman. In interpreting the subtle neediness of Jordan’s celebrity persona, these portraitists followed John Hoppner’s *Mrs. Jordan as the Comic Muse* (1786) where

the artist portrays Jordan's "artless" nature as a combination of innocence, naiveté, and dependence.

In the *Comic Muse*, Hoppner positions Jordan as a helpless victim of a lurid and grotesque spectator.¹⁵ (Figure 1.1) As a mythical persona, Jordan necessarily embodies the Muse by giving the Muse her literal and metaphorical face. Playing both the Muse and herself, Jordan necessarily invites the viewer to conflate her and the character, and in doing so, Jordan becomes the Comic Muse. As viewers, we are invited to read unto Jordan's body all of the Comic Muse's own signifiers: her natural setting, defensible posture, and her innocent pose. Such a reading would suggest that Dorothy Jordan, like the Comic Muse, exhibits the same qualities of the "natural" woman championed by the eighteenth-century narratives about women.

To encourage such a "natural" reading, the portrait uses multiple signifiers to position Jordan as a part of the natural landscape. First, Jordan is depicted in a natural landscape. The bright, blue mountaintops and majestic green trees are certainly meant to demonstrate Jordan's connection to the natural world, but, perhaps most environmental overt signifier is the cold, brown dirt the lofty celebrity is made to stand upon. These features are echoed in Jordan's costume: her loose, rolling gown features small, golden stars and atop her head sit a crown of ivy adorning her signature curls.¹⁶ All of these signifiers link Jordan with the "natural" woman described by her critics and position her as modern embodiment of the idealized woman.

¹⁵ Reynolds had actually painted a portrait of Francis Abington as the Comic Muse in 1768, four years before painting Siddons' and seven years before Hoppner's similarly titled work of Jordan.

¹⁶Perry suggests that artists used culturally laden signifiers such as Jordan's signature curls allude to the actress' reputation as a the "child of nature." In addition to what Perry refers to as "hairy signs," artists drew connections between Jordan and the natural world.



Figure 1.1 *Mrs. Jordan as the Comic Muse* by John Hoppner

These more overt signifiers are complimented with more abstract ideas of “naturalness” embodied most obviously by the presence of Euphrosyne, one of the three graces and goddess of Mirth. Jordan’s left hand is clasped around Euphrosyne who is not merely an adornment or accessory to Jordan. Rather, the muse is a necessary companion whom, according to Hoppner’s full title, “represses the advance of the satyr” by literally

shielding the actress from the satyr's unnatural, lustful gaze. Jordan herself turns her back to the satyr who is said to represent the lecherous male theatergoer.¹⁷ In the portrait, Jordan not only accepts the defense of Euphrosyne, but also requires it. Jordan's position as a defensible victim of the satyr's lustful gaze provides the viewer with an intimate portrait of the actress without the grotesque sexuality that the satyr represents. By highlighting the satyr's unnaturalness, Hoppner's portrait reinforces Jordan's own naturalness and innocence and positions her as a "natural" woman.

Despite Jordan's intimate portrait, we, as viewers, get the impression that Jordan is accessible. Indeed, the very intimacy of the portrait *makes* Jordan more accessible. She is turning away from the viewer's gaze, true, but she has also allowed the viewer, if only for a moment, to share in this moment with her. Rather than staring beyond the viewer or behind the viewer, Jordan peers knowingly straightforward. The viewer connects not with the hiding, lustful satyr nor with the distant, silent Euphrosyne, but with the fleeing Jordan who is both sympathetic and alluring in her flight. In doing so, Jordan becomes a vulnerable subject, a demure maid who catches—rather than holds—the viewer's gaze quite by accident as she turns away.

Hoppner's portrait suggests that not only does Comedy—the more eroticized form of drama and hence, less legitimate—necessitate the kind of defensiveness existent in Euphrosyne's treatment of the satyr, but that Jordan herself *needs* to be defended. As Jonathan Bate has explicated: "Hoppner's was explicitly undertaking a defense of the comic actress. The argument of the painting is something like this: sexual prey she may be, but easy prey she is not" (83). In emphasizing Jordan's pure performance of comedy

¹⁷For this argument, see Tomalin, pg. 70. Bate offers a more specific reading of the satyr symbolism by suggesting that the satyr, far from a generic figure, is John Milton's *Comus* (85).

against any claims of erotizing, *Mrs. Jordan as the Comic Muse* was possibly intended, Perry argues, “both by the artist and the sitter to suggest Jordan’s rejection of the sexual innuendo and voyeurism from which her (male) audience became notorious” (“Musing” 33). Hoppner’s portrait, in other words, worked in tandem with Jordan’s desires to be portrayed as a more innocent woman than her comedic roles may have otherwise suggested. Jordan, after all, viewed herself as a conduit for “Dame Nature”: “The secret of her charm, as she told a friend, was that, ‘when she had mastered the language of a part, she said to Dame Nature, my head, hands, feet, and every member about me, are at your commandment,’ and the bountiful goddess gave her no farther trouble with business” (Boaden 1:142). By giving herself over to “Dame Nature,” Jordan engaged with the same narrative of the “natural woman” as her male counterparts.

Jordan’s defensive position in Hoppner’s portrait coupled with the emphasis placed on her naturalness suggests that Jordan’s popular reputation from the beginning of her career fell under much scrutiny. Her desire to negate charges of licentiousness by offering herself as a vulnerable and natural woman is symptomatic of that scrutiny. Her desire to negate charges of licentiousness by offering herself as a vulnerable and natural woman is symptomatic of that scrutiny. By allowing audiences to see her as a vulnerable figure, Jordan was able offer her public a glimpse into her private life.

Jordan, of course, controlled this access in a process first described by Joseph Roach as public intimacy.¹⁸ According to Roach, public intimacy means the “illusion of availability” (3). By embracing public intimacy, Jordan transformed vulnerability into a marketable image meant to destabilize the sexual connotations connected with the

¹⁸Public intimacy has been explored in both Roach’s *It* and “Public History: The Prior History of ‘It.’”

comedic genre and those lurid male spectators. Public intimacy dictates that the admirer's obsession for the celebrity object manifests as a belief in the one-on-one nature of the relationship; the desire to own, consume, and retain the one-on-one nature of the relationship; and to protect the intimacy of that relationship. Thus, by its very nature, public intimacy is contrary—not contradictory—and originates from the necessary tension—psychological, visual, physical, sexual—between the celebrity object and the spectator. This description of public intimacy assumes that the celebrity-object produces the intimacy, which is then transferred to a waiting and passive spectator.

Like Roach, Felicity Nussbaum also explores the idea of intimacy through the concept of the “interiority effect,” which suggests that actresses like Jordan offer a highly commodified version of their private self to the public as a substituted for a “real” subject. In her discussion, Nussbaum describes the “interiority effect” as “not transparent but rather a provisional, multitiered, and situational interiority bolstered by the circulation of celebrity news and gossip, and one that, reduced to a fetishized version of itself, comes to substitute for the living, evolving person that is the actress herself” (21). Certainly, in the *Comic Muse* portrait, Jordan embodies such an interiority effect as she attempts to manifest a specific, and I would argue highly idealized, version of herself for public consumption. This provisional version does indeed substitute for the “real” Jordan whose personal life even at this stage in her career was much less pristine than this seemingly virginal earth goddess figure would suggest. Thus, through portraits like the *Comic Muse*, Jordan and her portraits offered a tightly controlled and symbolic version of the actress commiserate with her reputation as the “natural” woman perpetuated by her critics and admirers.

The public intimacy engendered by such representations of Jordan resulted in a kind of “Jordan-mania,” a term signifying the intense public obsession with the actress.¹⁹ As its name testifies, this celebrity-centered “mania” manifested as love, obsession, frenzy, and enthusiasm, overlapping in interesting and complicated ways. For her admirers, Jordan-mania involved the illusion of proximity described by Roach as public intimacy. In order to both express and satisfy their obsession, Jordan’s admirers attended performances, purchased ephemera, and visited her portraits all for the sake of creating the illusion of proximity to the celebrity object. For her critics, however, Jordan-mania manifested as an obsessive need to invert the image of the actress created through the public intimacy by displaying her faults and revealing her foibles for public scrutiny. While many critics obsessively attacked Jordan in the popular press, none were quite as afflicted with Jordan-mania as the caricaturists for whom Jordan served as a different kind of Muse than the one presented by Hoppner. For them, Jordan represented the archetypal “unnatural” woman: the whore.

1.2 The Public Jordan: Celebrity and Caricature in the Late Eighteenth Century

As an actress and royal consort, Jordan would have made an obvious subject for caricaturists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During this period, caricature had a particularly important relationship with the theatre, sharing many of the same design and layout theories. Comparing caricaturists with theatre managers, Jim Davis, a noted caricaturist researcher, notes how “Like the manager of the theatre, the caricaturist usually placed the principal focus of attention at the front of the image, arranging the other figures in radiating lines or an arc” (65). Viewing eighteenth- and

¹⁹ “Jordan-mania” is a term borrowed from Perry in “Musing” and Tomalin in *Mrs. Jordan’s Profession*.

nineteenth-century caricatures, therefore, would have been similar to viewing a scene on the stage: the principle characters in both caricatures and performances would be placed “center stage” with minor characters placed on stage left and right; the dramatic performance of the player translated into the exaggerated figure of the caricature; and the viewer’s ability to “read” the relationship between the characters in both theatrical productions. Like theatrical “props,” caricatures during the period would employ culturally and personally suggestive signifiers for their spectators in order to facilitate a proper “reading” of the scene. Not to mention many of the caricatures used a literal frame to demarcate the performing space much like the stage does for a scene. The performative quality of caricature—the design elements, arrangement, exaggeration, and signifiers—reinforced the relationship between caricature and theatre and this practice allowed caricaturists to treat viewers much like their theatergoing counterparts.

As a kind of pictorial theatre experience, caricatures provided viewers an insight, however sensationalized, into the personal world of their favorite celebrities. Much like modern tabloids, caricatures, as Robert L. Patten explains, showcase the “casual, private, momentary: the vitiated slouch of a debauchee, the effusive energy of roisterers, the indignity of flight” (52). As Patten’s description of the caricature argues, the nature of caricature itself was drawn from the emphasizing a subject caught in the act. Of course, the assumption for the artist and the viewer is that the “act” is in some way humiliating and scandalous. Being caught in the act also suggests that the subject of the piece is performing in a way that is contradictory to their public performance since caricature is “casual, private, and momentary.” The inherent performativity of being caught in the act is further emphasized by the idea that the viewer is granted a snapshot of the subject in

mid-action. Supposedly, the caricaturist is able to “catch” the subject acting themselves, which is why, as Patten notes, the caricature employs the power of *in media res* to invoke laughter, anger, or embarrassment. The idea personal and intimate nature of the caricature allows viewers to see the “real” subject as opposed to the subject’s public performance. The personal and intimate nature made these lampoons a dangerous weapon in the hands of apt slanderer.

While such personal attacks have become the norm for illustrated lampoons, they represent an important shift in visual satire occurring in the late-eighteenth century.²⁰ Amelia Rauser, who examined the allegorical prints of the early eighteenth-century and those in the age of Jordan, defines the personal emphasis in the late eighteenth century as symptomatic of a larger shift from allegory to subjectivity: “Whereas in emblematic or allegorical satires comprehension depends on the viewer’s cultural knowledge of symbols, caricature depends on the viewer’s physical proximity to and personal knowledge of the subject who is lampooned” (17). Thus, the more viewer’s know, or at least, the more they *think* they know, about the subject, the more they are able to understand the particular argument being made about the subject. In the Jordan’s case, her very public profession coupled with her equally public relationship with the Duke made her a very enticing figure for visual satire. What Rauser describes here is the inverse of Roach’s public intimacy wherein the spectator’s private insight is only an *illusion*. Working in *allusion*, caricature functioned as a kind of revelatory medium wherein the “truth” about a celebrity’s private life was revealed to the public.

²⁰ Rauser defines this shift as a preoccupation “with unmasking the authentic truth of subjective individuals and maintaining an ironic stance towards its subjects, caricature is emphatically different from earlier forms of visual satire” (15).

Noticing the frustration and skepticism of the theatergoing public, caricaturists used the allusiveness of caricature to radicalize their depictions of Jordan. By replacing allegorical figures with real celebrities, caricaturists turned individuals into the complex symbols of corruption, greed, and amorality that had previously been depicted only through icons such as “Lady Justice” and “Lady Liberty” as well as the English “John Bull” and the Scottish “Swaney.” In the case of Jordan, caricaturists looked for ways of transmogrifying the actress’ public image for the sake of politicizing her relationship with the Duke.

1.3 The Lady’s Face: The Delusion of Celebrity

After Jordan’s affair with the Duke was exposed, the popular press depicted Jordan as a manipulative *parvenu*, using her newly found position as theatrical and social royalty to lambast what they viewed as “unnatural” behavior. Attacking Jordan for her newfound socio-economic position several anonymous writers in the popular press published several incidary remarks that accused the actress of being a negligent mother. They insinuated that the actress deserted her children in a desperate pursuit of grandeur and respectability: “To be mistress of the King’s son Little Pickle thinks respectable, and so away go all tender ties to children. Ecod! she says she will now be company for some of your royal Duchesses, as others in her royal line are!” (qtd. in Jerrold 161). This writer’s remarks, published in popular *The Bon Ton Magazine*, paint Jordan—referred to her as by her popular “Little Pickle” character—as a negligent mother whose “tender ties” to her children are conditional to her social position.²¹ Such accusations came to a head when in late November of 1791, Jordan found herself unable to perform one

²¹ “Little Pickle” is a reference a character by the same name in the farce *The Spoiled Child*.

evening after suffering from some medical difficulties. Having absented herself from Drury Lane, the gathered audience grew riotous when their favorite actress did not appear. The audience, spurred on by reports of Jordan's profligate offstage behavior, determined that Jordan's wayward lifestyle had begun to affect her performance. The press' intrusion in and interference with Jordan's personal life meant that these minor inconveniences became sources of major conflict and unrest in theatergoing audiences.

Responding to popular criticisms of Jordan's personal life affecting her acting, caricaturists drew analogues between Jordan's theatrical repertoire and her personal life. They found an easy correlation between Jordan's current rise in social status and one of Jordan's most popular characters: Nell from Charles Coffey's ballad opera *The Devil to Pay; or the Wife Metamorphos'd*. The ballad opera tells the story of two women: an abusive and acerbic Lady, and the poor, charitable cobbler's wife named Nell. The audience is first introduced to Nell, who, despite her protests, cannot stop her abusive husband, Jobson, from drinking and carousing in town. The next scene takes place at Sir John's house where the Lady of the house has been abusing her household servants.²² The servants have been enjoying a night of revelry and have been lackadaisical with their chores. Sir John attempts to argue on their behalf but cannot prevail over his acerbic wife. In the midst of the revelry, a doctor appears at the door begging for the hospitality of the house and a night's rest. The Lady unceremoniously ejects the doctor from the house after accusing him of witchcraft. The doctor soon finds himself on Nell's doorstep, and despite the obvious poverty of his hostess, he is offered charity. In return for her hospitality, the doctor offers to compensate Nell with a fabulous fortune. Before

²² For more on representations of servants in the eighteenth century, see Straub, "The Making of an English Audience."

Nell can appropriately respond, Jobson reappears and abuses his wife for what he perceives as her infidelity. The doctor is summarily discharged from the house, and everything appears to continue as it always has. In the next scene, however, Nell wakes up in the Lady's bed. In disbelief, she blames it on a night of wild dreaming:

What pleasant Dreams I have had To-night! Me-thought I was in Paradise, upon a bed of Violets and Roses, and the sweetest Husband by my Side! Ha! bless me, where am I now? What Sweets are these? No Garden in the Spring can equal them; Am I on a Bed? The sheets are Sarsenet sure, no Linen ever was so fine. What a gay, silken Robe have I got? Oh Heaven! I dream! Yet if this be a Dream, I would not wish to wake again. Sure, I died last Night, and went to Heaven, and this is it. (18)

Nell's "dream" life, however, does not last. The doctor returns to explain the transformation saying: "I have transform'd your Lady's Face so that she seems the Cobbler's Wife, and have charm'd her Face into the Likeness of my Lady's; and last Night when the Storm arose, my Spirits convey'd them to each other'd Bed" (28). The "magick" only works enough for Nell's abusive husband and the Lady to learn a lesson about charity and the two are switched back again. Nell "wakes up" a cobbler's wife once more albeit with a more compassionate husband; the Lady also rises in her rightful place, but perhaps more humble for the experience.

Jordan performed the part of Nell with some regularity, and when she did, she was highly praised for her efforts. Indeed, there are no fewer than five engravings of Jordan in the character and at least one portrait by J. Rogers that is unfortunately now lost. In addition to the illustrative ephemera, Jordan received overwhelming critical praise for the

humble Nell.²³ James Boaden, who wrote *The Life of Mrs. Jordan*, argued that to talk about her performance in the part of Nell was “unnecessary” because “those who have seen it will *laugh* at the very word; those who have not may rest satisfied that every succeeding performer of the part will preserve some of her *naïveté*, with such powers as they can bring to the competition” (1:142). Certainly, Nell’s enduring patience and unblemished charity coupled with Jordan’s execution of the character’s *naïveté* reinforced the image of Jordan as the “child of nature.”

What made Nell a persuasive candidate for Jordan’s repertoire, however, also made her an equally perfect for satire. The name “Nell” had more significance to Jordan’s public reputation than just Coffey’s transformed cobbler’s wife. When Nell was used to refer to Jordan, the name also became an allusion to Nell Gwyn, the infamous Restoration actress and mistress of Charles II. Like Jordan, Gwyn was accused of political and social maneuvering, and her position in the court rankled many of King’s political rivals.²⁴ When used in reference to Jordan, the Nell moniker, according to Jonathan Bate, became a nickname for “the archetypal actress-mistress” (88). Using this allusion as a signifier for a politically meddlesome actress, caricaturists transmogrified the figure of Jordan’s naïve Nell into the symbol for a social-climbing actress.

By drawing on Coffery’s play and the allusion to Gwyn, caricaturists made comparisons between the fictional metamorphosis of these women into “ladies” and the

²³ Highfill, vol. 8, pg. 262.

²⁴ For more on Gwyn’s life and influence see Beauclerk, *Nell Gwyn* (2005); Cunningham, *The Story of Nell Gwyn* (1888); Dasent, *Nell Gwynne* (1924); Howe, *The First English Actresses* (1992); MacGregor-Hastie, *Nell Gwyn* (1987); Melville, *Nell Gwyn* (1926); and Wilson, *Nell Gwyn* (1952).



equally fictitious metamorphosis of Jordan into the consort of a future King. In William Dent's *The Flattering Glass, or Nell's Mistake* (1791), for instance, Dent depicts Jordan's transformation from the humble actress into the Duke's mistress. (Figure 1.2) Looking into the "flattering glass," the buxom Jordan exclaims: "Oh Gemini! is that gay, fine thing me if it is and the Glass be true, I am no less than my Lady Dutchess!" Jordan's transformation is purely mental: that "gay, fine thing" refers to the ducal coronet that appears, not on her head, but in the glass. By placing the coronet on Jordan's reflection and not Jordan herself, Dent suggests that Jordan's delusions of grandeur are no more than that: delusions. Jordan only appears to have changed "face," but in reality, is only a pretender to the crown.

The phantom image of Jordan as the "Lady Dutchess" echoes the temporary transformation of Nell from Coffery's play and suggests that like a temporarily glorified cobbler's wife, Jordan will eventually return to her humbler status. Moreover, because the scene takes place in her dressing room, Dent underscores Jordan's obvious performance of a duchess and draws a distinction between "natural" nobility and manufactured nobility.²⁵ In other words, Jordan can only *act* like a duchess because she cannot *be* a duchess. When coupled with the dressing room, the entire caricature suggests that like any of her fictional roles, the role of duchess is equally an imitation. Ultimately, Dent asks the viewer to question whom or what is Jordan is performing.

This question of performance is further reinforced by the Duke's appearance in the doorway of the dressing room. Peeking through a small crack in the door, Duke calls out to the dressing Jordan: "Nelly! Nelly come here and Play your Part! Oh! how purely

²⁵ For more on the significance of actresses' dressing rooms, see Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity*, pgs. 43-44; and Chico *Designing Women*.

she does it!”. Dent certainly means for us to read the word “part” as a reference to both the night’s theatrical role and her role as the Duke’s lover. But is Jordan actually the future “Lady Dutchess” or is she just playing the part for the evening? The answer perhaps lies with the fictional Nell who Coffey portrays as quite literally two-faced. The character of Nell, who wears both her face and the “Lady’s face,” suggests that every performer necessarily has two faces, and it is Janus-faced nature of performance that has even the Duke confused. The Duke himself appears unable to tell fact from fiction as he calls his lover “Nelly” instead Jordan. In addition to the doubling of Nelly and Jordan, Dent further reinforces the conflation between reality and performance by providing Jordan with her own mirror-double. The result is that the “real” Jordan is only a summation of her characters and a reflection of her desires. If there is a genuine Jordan in the caricature, she is successfully buried beneath her doubles.

The slippage between the performed reality and the genuine reality is further reinforced by the Duke’s use of “pure” to describe the scene before him. In describing Jordan’s portrayal of “Nelly,” the Duke exclaims, “how purely she does it!” Here, the word pure can be read as an allusion to critics’ use of the word “natural” in reference to the authenticity of Jordan’s acting. But if Jordan’s performance is as “pure” offstage as it is onstage, then which performance is actually authentic and which is the “fake”? The Duke, again, appears confused on this account. He cannot tell if her onstage or offstage performance is more authentic nor can he decide if it is Jordan’s performance of Nell that is authentic or Jordan’s performance of Jordan that is the genuine representation of the actress. The flattering glass, of course, undermines the “purity” of Jordan’s performance, as does her clear desire for that “gay, fine thing.” While Jordan built her reputation on

naïve and innocent characters like Nell, Dent suggests that Jordan has little in common with her fictional roles. Dent uses the “flattering glass” to represent Jordan’s true desires for grandeur and power, desires that are presumably satisfied by her licentious affair with the Duke. By catching Jordan in the act of lusting after wealth and status, Dent suggests that this caricature captures the “real” Jordan whereas as characters like Nell only serve to deceive those who cannot go behind a dressing room’s closed doors. Here, in the private space of her dressing room, Jordan is finally revealed as the social-climbing, two-faced monster that she really is.

Dent, of course, was not the only caricaturist to capitalize on the slippage between fact and fiction in order to catch Jordan in a compromising situation. Like Dent, James Gillray’s *The Devil to Pay; —the wife metamorphos’d, or Neptune reposing, after Fording the Jordan* (1791) conflates Jordan with her Nell character in order to question the reason and nature of Jordan’s theatrical performance. (Figure 1.3) Like Dent, Gillray’s *The Devil to Pay* takes place in an intimate setting. Instead of the actress’ dressing room, Gillray gives the audience access to the couple’s bedroom and more specifically, their bed. Again, the private nature of the setting suggests that the events of the caricature reveal a hidden truth about how Jordan behaves when she is not under public scrutiny. The implication here is that this representation of Jordan is more authentic than her popular reputation.

While the viewer is granted access to the couple’s boudoir, Jordan more closely resembles a theatrical player than she does a royal lover. Instead of pillow talk, Gillray has Jordan recite Nell’s monologue from when the poor cobbler’s wife wakes to discover that she has been transformed into a lady. Gillray’s inclusion of this speech is significant

for two reasons. First, Jordan's performance of a theatrical monologue outside of the theatre reinforces her relationship to Nell and further encourages the slippage between Jordan's on and offstage lives. After all, the revelatory speech in the Coffery's play takes place in the lady's bed and here Gillray appears to use the Duke's bed as a real life double. Second, by having Jordan perform this speech in bed, Gillray suggests the actress' miraculous transformation from a poor, Irish actress to the mistress of a Duke has nothing to do with her personal charms. Jordan herself is silenced by Nell's speech, and the viewers are provided with no real personal information about the relationship save her discarded clothing, which is obviously an allusion to a tawdry sexual encounter. Instead, this relationship appears to have everything to do with Jordan's ability to "perform" in the Duke's bed. This performance is both literal and metaphorical since she is literally performing a role from her repertoire after having "performed" sexually for the exhausted Duke. Ultimately, the implication of the piece is that once Jordan has finished these performances that she, like Nell, will be returned to her humbler and more socially appropriate station.

Gillray's interest showing Jordan's sexual performance is further demonstrated in the scene itself. The caricature clearly takes place after coitus where the Duke, or "Neptune" as the title refers to him, is found reposing *after* fording the Jordan. The phrase "Fording the Jordan" alludes most overtly to the biblical story of the Israelites crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land.²⁶ While the River Jordan is parted so

²⁶The parting of the River Jordan is recounted thusly: "And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) That the waters which came down from above stood *and* rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, *and* were cut off: and the people passed over right against

that the Israelites can pass safely into the land decreed to them by God, Gillray suggests that Jordan herself has been parted so that the Duke may safely pass through and into the actress' Promised Land. The grotesque transformation of the biblical story into a story of sexual promiscuity suggests that Jordan's excessive sexuality has the ability to taint the sacred institutions of chastity, marriage, and domesticity and render the monarchy profane with her very body. The profanity of Jordan's body, of course, is a direct contradiction to the narrative of "naturalness" and "purity" exposed by her admirers, and the fact that viewers are not just allowed but encouraged to peek inside the bedroom walls suggests that Jordan's hyper-sexuality is fodder for public consumption. As an actress, spectators already have unprecedented access to Jordan's body, and Gillray merely adds another layering to the intimacy she already shares with her public. Gillray's conflation between the bedroom and the stage, therefore, reinforces the sexual nature of her performances both on and off stage.

Of course, while making Jordan an example of the ruined woman, Gillray also embodies the actress with a kind of profane power. Her body may be excessive, sexual, and lewd, but her ability to use her body to challenge culturally sacred institutions and to rise to the heights of social influence means that she also has agency. Gillray attempts to undermine Jordan's profane agency by suggesting that the source of her power, her body, is always already corrupted by the excessiveness of her sexuality. While "Fording the Jordan" refers to the biblical story, it is also an allusion to the actress' sexual past.

"Fording" alludes to Jordan's previous lover, Richard Ford, with whom she had several

Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan" (*The Bible*, Joshua 3:15-17).

illegitimate children. While this extramarital affair was certainly questionable, the public was willing to overlook the scandal in favor of their beloved actress. However, when Jordan left Ford for the Duke, the forgiving public was not as forgiving, and the affair caused quite the popular scandal. By alluding to Jordan's previous liaison, Gillray portrays Jordan as a manipulative *parvenu* who uses her body to socially powerful men for her own benefit. In so doing, the caricaturist attempts to undermine her celebrity ethos as the "child of nature" and render her cultural agency as illegitimate as her relationships.

In the name of revealing Jordan's "real" self to the public, Gillray and Dent displayed the actress' most intimate moments for public scrutiny and rendered her private life as an object of spectacle. Both caricaturists provided their audiences with fleeting glimpses into the personal world of their favorite celebrity, and while both depictions are obviously fictionalized, they demanded to be taken as the truth. By using the character of Nell, Gillray and Dent demonstrated how fact and fiction were often more malleable in the context of theatrical celebrity. Nell also provided both artists with a vehicle to demonstrate their contempt for Jordan's sudden climb to the height of political and social influence.

In the way that life often imitates art, the work by Dent and Gillray became sadly prophetic. According to theatre legend, Jordan was performing the part of Nell the night she received word from the Duke that he was leaving for a more socially acceptable companion: a "real" princess. Many of Jordan's biographers recount how Jordan

received the Duke's letter before going to play the part of Nell, and despite the crushing blow, the actress decided to continue with the production.²⁷ Jerrold describes how

One pathetic incident marked the evening in a scene where she should have been accused by a character named Jobson of having been made laughing drunk. The poor thing tried to laugh at her cue, and instead burst into tears, upon which keen-witted Jobson said—"Why, Nell, the conjuror has not only made thee drunk, he has made thee crying drunk." (318)

In that moment, Jordan, like Nell, was transformed back into her humbler station and forced to forfeit the silken robes of the lady.

1.4 The Crack'd Jordan: Actresses and Chamber Pots

Using the character of Nell, caricaturists drew upon Jordan's popular reputation as a "natural" woman to suggest that her naiveté was as contrived as her onstage personas. The "real" Jordan, they demanded, was nothing more than a social-climbing actress who held delusions of grandeur. Nell's transformation, moreover, served as a convenient vehicle for their critiques about Jordan's equally magical transformation from an illegitimate daughter of a failed Irish actress into the consort of a King's son. Of course, socio-economic status is not the only transformation that caricaturists noted. In addition to her transformation from actress to lady, caricaturists used their images to suggest that Jordan's material lusting after that "gay, fine thing" was an indication of an underlying grotesque sexual lust. By depicting Jordan's overt and excessive sexuality, caricaturists offered their audiences an image of the actress that was diametrically opposed to her image as the "child of nature."

²⁷ Boaden recounts a similar story to Jerrold (2:272).

Caricaturists symbolized Jordan's grotesque sexuality through the familiar image of the chamber pot. In Gillray's *The Devil to Pay*, for instance, the caricature signifies the actress' questionable activities in the Duke's bed by using a chamber pot to signify the actress with the words "Public Jordan Open to All Parties" inscribed on its side. While the double entendre here might be lost on modern viewers, eighteenth-century spectators would have immediately recognized its significance. Jordan had the misfortune to have a name that was synonymous not only with the famous river but also with the colloquial term for a chamber pot.²⁸ Some of the "misfortune" was her own making. Jordan was born Dorothy Bland and took the name "Jordan" on the advice of former manager, Tate Wilkinson, who suggested it as an allusion an apparent allusion to the river Jordan since the actress had to cross the channel between Ireland and England: "In conversation [Wilkinson] used to claim the honor of having been her godfather on this occasion, and, as the son of a clergyman, indulged himself with an allusion to the 'Jordan,' which she had luckily passed whatever badge of her former slavery she might still carry about her; and she gratefully bore the name on this pious recommendation" (Boaden 1:28). The possibilities of her name did not go unnoticed by eighteenth-century caricaturists who used it as a symbol for the actress' own bodily excesses. By transforming Jordan into a vessel that symbolizes waste, caricaturists alluded to this popular discourse that viewed actresses as passive receptacles for the excesses of eighteenth-century society.

Of all the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century caricaturists who used the chamber pot as a symbol for the actress, James Gillray used the personal toilet more frequently and

²⁸ See also Jerrold, pg. 63.

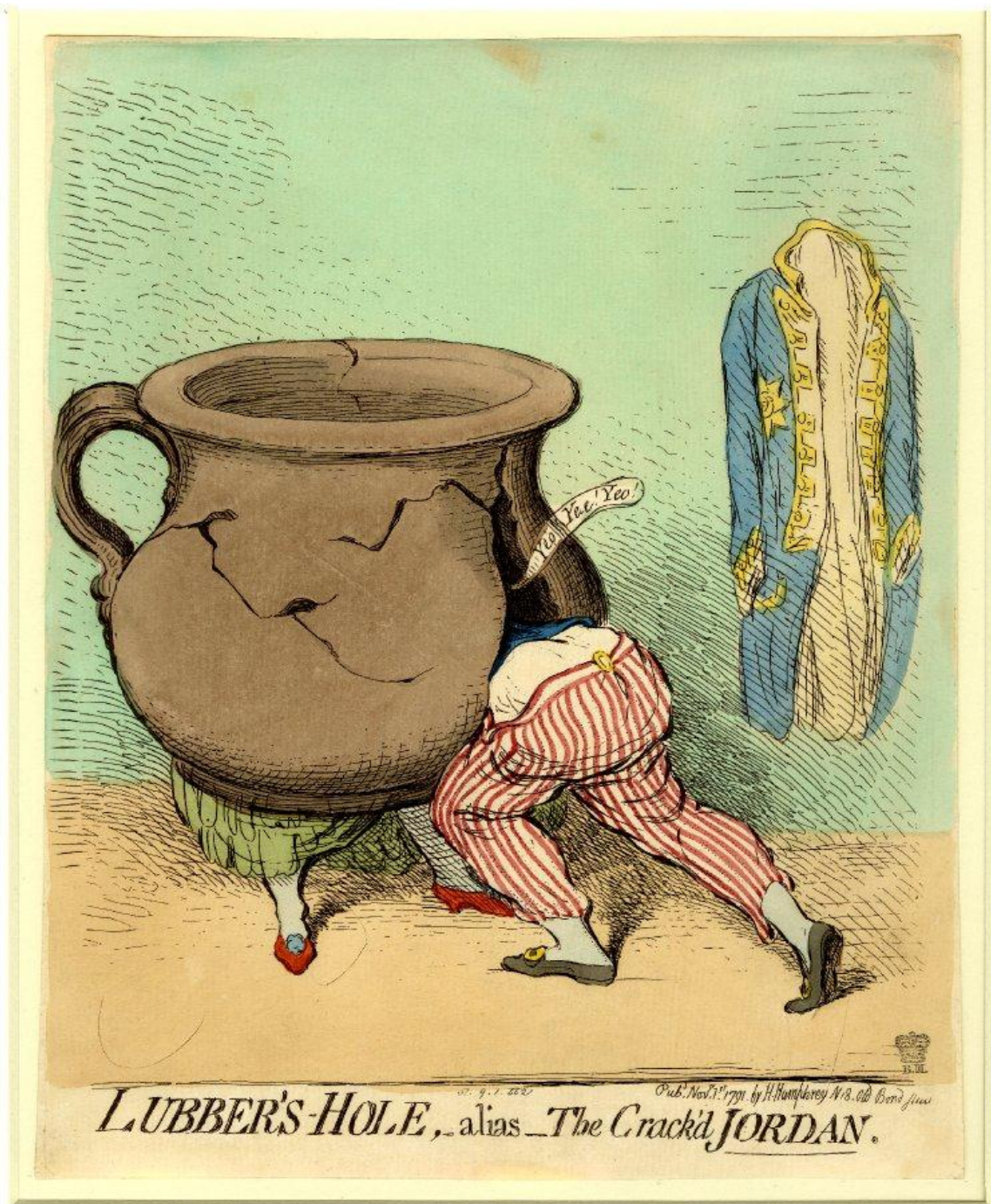


Figure 1.4 *The Lubber's Hole, -alias- The Crack'd Jordan* by James Gillray. British Museum.

with more biting wit than any of his contemporaries. One of the earliest and most popular images of Jordan as a chamber pot is Gillray's *The Lubber's Hole*. *Lubber's Hole* initially appears to be a simple satire on a member of the royal family whose public foibles have been magnified for comedic pleasure. (Figure 1.4) As the title implies, the obvious target of the piece is the Duke, signified by his naval uniform: the red-stripped pants and the blue jacket with gold epaulettes. While the Duke had retired from active military service in 1790, the popular press continued to derogatively refer to him using nautical epithets well after his ascension to the throne.²⁹ Gillray capitalizes on the Duke's popular reputation as a clumsy and inexperienced sailor by derogatorily referring to him as a "lubber."

In nautical slang, a "lubber" most specifically refers to a clumsy or inexperienced sailor, but it can also be short for a "landlubber," which is a derogatory term for someone who is unfamiliar with sea or seamanship. More generally, a "lubber" can also be used to refer to an unintelligent or awkward person. In the context of the caricature, "lubber" is also a play on the word "lover," and the homophonic resonance between "lubber" and "lover" allows Gillray to paint the Duke as a clumsy, awkward, inexperienced, and unintelligent lover. These traits are further emphasized by Gillray's portrayal of the Duke as a headless torso strategically placed in the center of the caricature. The Duke, Gillray suggests, is as recognizable as a round, red buttocks, exposed backside, and lumpy stomach as he is with a face. The misshapen nature of the Duke's body, the

²⁹The popular press regularly referred to him as the "Sailor King" such as this writer from *The Times* on January 25, 1831, "they will have the additional honour of attending our 'Sailor King,' and this writer, also from *The Times* six years later, "ever since the accession of our sailor King."

clumsiness of his entry, and his awkward singing of sea chanty-esque “Yeo! Yee! Yeo!” transform the royal son into a grotesque, repulsive lover.

At first glance, the Gillray piece appears to be a simple satire on the ridiculousness of the Duke’s sexual overtures and his less than gratifying sexual execution of them, but the target of the piece is the nondescript—or seemingly nondescript—chamber pot that appears propped against the corner. The viewer’s only clue to who (or what) the chamber pot alludes to is through its proximity to the Duke. The caricature, then, supposes that the audience has some previous knowledge of the relationship and that they will be able to use that knowledge coupled with the Duke’s signifiers to determine Jordan’s identity. The result is that Jordan’s identity, much like her body, is erased, turning the actress into a cipher through which the Duke’s identity might be divined.

Gillray complicates Jordan’s identity in the caricature further still by transforming her into a vessel for the Duke’s sexual attentions haphazard though they might be. While the title leads the viewer to believe that Jordan is the lubber’s hole, the caricature itself transforms her into the “crack’d Jordan” from the second part of the title. Gillray replaces the actress’ physical body proper with an oversized, cracked jordan or chamber pot. The only human part of the actress remaining in the caricature are her legs, and one suspects that Gillray allows her legs to remain in order to emphasize that the fissure on the pot corresponds to the Jordan’s genitals. Thus, the only human remnants of the actress are left in place so that Gillray can make a crude sexual pun at the actress’ expense.

Gillray's argument here is certainly more pointed than a simple criticism of an individual actress' seeming moral failings, and the portrayal of the chamber pot itself provides some insights into the caricature's meta-argument. After its overwhelming size, the chamber pot is remarkable for the giant fissures that crisscross its surface, and the most obvious of these is the one where the Duke is seen entering. Located between Jordan's disembodied legs and used to signify her genitals, the size of this particular fissure suggests that the actress' vagina, much like her morals, are—to use the colloquial expression—“loose.” The Duke, after all, is able to fit his entire upper body and torso into the cavity. The size and amount of “cracks” have rendered the vessel unusable for its intended purpose for, unlike other caricatures of the actress, this latrine is empty. That is not to say that the Duke is not intending on using the vessel; indeed, the caricature suggests that he will fill the cavity with himself. Gillray depicts Jordan as a passive figure in this sexual encounter—a literal and figurative vessel containing the Duke and his lustful desires—rendering her into an object of (male) sexual gratification.

Gillray's depiction of Jordan as a non-entity, a broken toilet, and passive vessel suggests that the actress is something more than just a royal mistress. In the title, *The Lubber's Hole-alias-The Crack'd Jordan*, Gillray knowingly conflates the lubber's hole and the cracked chamber pot in the title by using the word “alias” to connect the two epithets and asks the viewer to read Jordan's body as both a lubber's hole and a chamber pot. A lubber's hole refers to a hole in the ship's platform that one can climb through in order to reach the upper part of the mast. In the caricature, Gillray transmogrifies Jordan's body into the lubber's hole, insinuating that the actress' identity—and perhaps her worth—is entirely sexual. Additionally insulting is the nature of the lubber's hole is

to provide the seaman access to the upper the masts meaning that Jordan as the lubber's hole is only thoroughfare for the Duke, a passageway to something or someone higher on the social ladder.

As both the "lubber's hole" and the chamber pot, Jordan becomes utilitarian object. As the lubber's hole, Jordan is a dalliance for the Duke on his ascension to society's upper echelons. As the chamber pot, the actress becomes a vessel for the Duke's excess, a needed sexual relief for the royal son. In either case, Jordan herself becomes an empty space for the Duke to fill with his sexual lust. Her body and, indeed, her entire identity are thus reduced to a hole for the Duke's pleasure and, by extension, the pleasure of the viewer. Jordan's transformations render her a receptacle not only for the Duke's lust and desire but also for the viewer's lusts and the desires.

Gillray's desire to connect Jordan and a chamber pot might appear superficial at first glance—a play on the actress' stage name—but beyond the potty humor, Gillray uses the chamber pot to level a serious critique against the actress. Whether a chamber pot is painted or plain, made of porcelain or clay, the vessel itself is a fairly utilitarian object: the chamber pot is used to collect the liquid and solid waste materials produced by the human body. Transforming someone into a chamber pot, therefore, would be to imply that they are receptacles of waste, excrement, and excess. The obvious connection, then, is that like a chamber pot, Jordan also literally and metaphorically embodies these same characteristics. This connotation, however, is only one layer of the complex connection between the seemingly unrelated actress and chamber pot.

Focusing on the relationship between sexual excess and physical access, Gillray provides several cues to the viewer to connect this lampoon to socio-historical discourses

about actresses. The piece captures the two lovers in mid-coitus, with the Duke literally entering his lover. Jordan's excessiveness is symbolized both by the chamber pot and by the size of her "crack." Excess, whether it is material, moral, or sexual, is only possible with access and, indeed, Gillray asks us to consider the question of access by drawing our attention to the considerable size of the "crack," and the Duke's unseemly entrance. The size of this "crack" suggests that the actress has not only given the Duke access to her body, but that indeed she has given many others the same level of access and the implication of sexual promiscuity links this piece to actress-as-whore metanarrative.

Gillray's *Lubber's Hole*, alluring as it is damning, is only one example of caricaturists transmogrifying Jordan into a symbol of sexual deviance and promiscuity. A more explicit example of how caricaturists used the chamber pot as an allusion to the actress-as-whore metanarrative would be Gillray's *The Lubber's Hole* is a similarly themed caricature by the artist William Dent entitled *Fording the Jordan*. Dent's *Fording the Jordan* was published on November 8, 1791, exactly a week after the Gillray piece. Dent's chamber pot motif is similar to Gillray's *The Lubber's Hole*, but, if it is possible, *Fording the Jordan* is even more explicit in its commentary on Jordan. While it is difficult to imagine that Gillray's *The Lubber's Hole* could be described as subtle, Dent's work is less coded as to its overall message. The explicit and straightforward execution of the Dent piece helps to both clarify and complicate the argument Gillray makes about Jordan in *The Lubber's Hole*.

Like Gillray, Dent locates Jordan's sexual deviance in her body, which he depicts as a hyper-sexualized object. The caricature shows the figure of the Duke, again seen in his signifying naval uniform. Standing waste-deep in a full chamber pot, the caricatured

Duke exclaims, “I shall be lost in Thee Jordan.” (Figure 1.5) The bare-breasted figure of Jordan, represented with her signature curls, responds, “Where should a wounded Tar be but in the Cockpit?” The viewer immediately recognizes that the actress’ body is positioned in an awkward and uncomfortable contortion: her legs oddly swing upwards while her waist is bent at an impossible angle. Jordan’s words give one possible reason for her grotesque appearance. She asks the Duke, “Where should a wounded Tar be but in the Cockpit?” Since the Duke is literally standing inside of her, the actress identifies



Figure 1.5 *Fording the Jordan* by William Dent. British Museum.

herself as the “cockpit.” The word “cockpit” has several applicable definitions. Most obviously, “cockpit” refers to space on a naval vessel devoted to the care of the war wounded. This definition, of course, makes sense given that Jordan refers to her lover as a “wounded Tar.” “Cockpit” can also refer to the space before the stage or the “pit” in theatrical terms. This second meaning might be a sly wink and nod to the viewer, suggesting that where this “wounded Tar” is really recovering is not on a military ship, but in the theatre, or, more specifically, in Jordan’s “cockpit” (sexual innuendo intended).

Jordan’s position also obviously recalls the bowl shape of a chamber pot. Mimicking the shape of her moniker, Jordan’s body is inextricably connected to the meanings and connotations of the chamber pot itself. Dent’s chamber pot, much like Gillray’s in *Lubber’s Hole*, appears cracked and broken. Since Dent has explicitly asked the viewer to conflate Jordan’s body with the chamber pot, even going as far as to paint her upon it, the viewer sees Jordan as physically and morally cracked and broken. This idea is emphasized further still by the contents of the chamber pot itself for, unlike Gillray’s caricature, Dent’s chamber pot is full almost to the point of overflowing. The chamber pot and, by extension, the actress are both “full” of the Duke, who is apparently “recovering” inside. In addition to the sexual connotations, the chamber pot itself cannot escape the object’s associations with waste, excrement, and excess.

Dent suggests that the excess of eighteenth-century society is sexual in nature and embodied, quite literal, in the figure of the actress. The most obvious sexual allusion is the figure of Jordan herself: her bare-breasted and barelegged body lies at the bottom of the chamber pot, beckoning her lover to come into her “cockpit.” Jordan’s hyper-sexualized body serves to underscore what is perhaps the less obvious sexual allusion in

the piece. Almost covered by Jordan's reclining figure, the inscription on the chamber pot reveals Dent's most damning message. The inscription reads, "1000£ a year for the use of this Jordan," an allusion to the rumored amount the Duke had reportedly given his mistress for a year's allowance. Dent uses the inscription coupled with Jordan's hyper-sexualized body to infer that the amount is actually a payment for sexual services. This inference works to transform Jordan from royal mistress and partner into a high-cost prostitute.

The sexual *quid pro quo* suggested here is further complicated by the inscription's generalized and ambiguous language. The inscription most directly alludes to the Duke, who has not just paid the 1000£ to "use" the Jordan but is currently "using" it. The inscription, however, can also be read as an invitation or, perhaps more suggestively, as an advertisement. The inscription implies that Jordan is for hire for "1000£ a year" to the Duke or to anyone able to pay the sum. Jordan, in other words, is available for "use." The word "use" reduces Jordan not just to a body available for hire but a body that is to be "used" for sexual gratification. "Use" also suggests that Jordan's body, like a chamber pot, serves only a utilitarian purpose: like chamber pots, actresses are meant to be "used" and then, like the waste they retain, to be discarded. The link between actresses and chamber pots becomes one of use-value. They both have their "uses": chamber pots are "used" to collect the waste excesses of the human body and actresses are "used" to collect the sexual excesses. The idea that Jordan has a use-value, of course, links this piece to the metanarrative regarding actress as prostitutes.³⁰ By linking Jordan

³⁰The actress-as-whore metanarrative unsurprisingly has been the topic of much feminist analyses. Focusing on issues of gender and sexual agency, scholars such as Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*; Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse*; and Straub, *Sexual Suspects* have examined how the actress-as-whore image

to this metanarrative, caricaturists such as Dent and Gillray re-presented Jordan as the inverse of the “natural” woman: the iconic image of the “public” Jordan.

1.5 “I Strumpet, Creature, Pickle”: Jordan as the Royal Family’s Burning Shame

Jordan’s “unnatural” femininity became the subject of much debate not only over polite tea tables and in gossip columns but also in the print shops and caricaturists’ studios. While Jordan herself had built a reputation for herself based on the “child of nature” image, her affair with the Duke of Clarence called her innocence and naiveté into question. Certainly, the extramarital nature of the relationship would have been scandalous enough to provide fodder for the gossips and the satirists, but Jordan’s background coupled with her profession made her an even more impressive target for the public’s sharpened barbs. As the illegitimate daughter of a poor Irish actress, Jordan’s pedigree was far from royal, and unlike previous actresses turned mistresses, she continued to appear on the public stage throughout the duration of her relationship with the Duke. The illegitimacy of the relationship coupled with a growing suspicion of Jordan’s personal life pushed the actress into the epicenter of critical derision. The “child of nature” was now the very public face of royal family rife with scandal, sex, and intrigue.

Critics such as Dent and Isaac Cruikshank used their work to further arguments about legitimate and illegitimate partnership and the importance of perception in matters of propriety. In Dent’s *The Contrast* (1792), for instance, the artist raises the question of legitimacy as he compares what he believes is the legitimate relationship of Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany, and his new wife, Princess Frederica Charlotte of

influence actresses’ reputations within eighteenth-century culture. Building on such readings, Engel’s *Fashioning Celebrity* and Nussbaum’s *Rival Queens* explores how actresses manipulated the newly commercial theatre through sexuality and in doing so, gained social mobility, authority, and autonomy.

Prussia. (Figure 1.6) In the forefront of the drawing, Dent depicts the Prince and the Princess walking along, arm-in-arm, literally basking in the resplendent glory of their blessed nuptials. The royal couple, married legitimately in the eyes of the Church of England, are enshrined in a yellow halo, which apparently represents the flame of “virtuousness.” To the right, Dent depicts “the contrast”: a house where an exaggerated lantern sits with the words, “A burning shame, or, adulterous Disgrace” displayed below it. On the door of the house is the couples’ “crest”: a cracked Jordan, symbolizing the actress, and an anchor, a reference to the Duke’s naval career. The two figures signified by the door appear in an opened window. Jordan and the Duke appear engaged in an intimate embrace, which is contrasted with the more appropriate arm-in-arm walk of the



Figure 1.6 *The Contrast* by William Dent. British Museum.

Prince and Princess. Jordan, who wears a similar white gown as the Princess, is depicted bare-chested, making her the “shameful” inverse of the virginal Princess. And, unlike the Princess, Jordan’s “shameful” affair with the Duke takes place in private and in the shadows.

The definitions of legitimacy and illegitimacy at play in the work speak to definitions about marriage, propriety, and relationships in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In *The Contrast*, the differences between the Prince and Princess and the Duke and Jordan, other than Dent’s use of signifiers, is that the Prince and Princess have the approval of the reigning monarch and Jordan and the Duke do not. Legitimacy, as Dent depicts it, can be conferred through the established institutions of marriage, monarch, and church. Jordan’s relationship, by contrast, lacks any of the signifiers of legitimacy. Dent depicts the illegitimate nature of the affair as an “unnatural” or against the supposedly natural order of things. In fact, this relationship is so illegitimate that it must be hidden behind closed doors and dark rooms. What Dent completely disregards, however, is that by all accounts, Jordan and Duke were content, dedicated, and monogamous in their relationship. Instead, the caricaturist seems only concerned with the traditional signifiers of legitimacy and if couples live within the tightly demarcated space of social propriety.³¹ Thus, the definition Dent creates about legitimate relationships has less to do with the actual relationship and more to do with the legal, political, and social perception of it.

While Dent provides his viewership with a positive model to offset the obvious negative example of Jordan and the Duke, other caricaturists sought to draw a

³¹ For more on Jordan and marriage, see Brooks, especially pgs. 64-68.

distinctively profligate portrait of the royal family. In Isaac Cruickshank's *The Pot Calling the Kettle Black a [...] or two of a Trade can never Agree* (1791), the caricaturist takes on the Prince Regent, already known as notorious womanizer, and his relationship with his long-time mistress, Maria Fitzherbert in order to demonstrate the profligate nature of the entire royal family. (Figure 1.7) While Dent singles out Jordan and the Duke as “shameful” in *The Contrast*, Cruickshank shows how no one in the royal seems to be untouched by the taint of illegitimacy.



Figure 1.7 *The Pot Calling the Kettle Black a [...] or two of a Trade can never Agree* by Isaac Cruickshank. British Museum.

The Cruickshank piece is intended to represent a “private” moment in the royal house between the two sons and their two mistresses. The supposedly private moment, of course, is particularly sensationalized and meant to suggest that even within the intimacy of the royal house, the sons and their mistresses cannot avoid conflict and scandal. In the piece, Cruickshank portrays Fitzherbert, center, towering over the rather diminutive form of Jordan who is depicted with her signature curls. The actress is further “labeled” by an exaggerated miniature of the Duke around her neck—an item that the actress apparently never removed not for her onstage costumes.³² Fitzherbert, dressed in the latest fashion, demands the removal of Jordan from the gathering: “Get out you Strumpet how Dare you come into my presence! what do you think I’d keep company with such a Pickle as yow pray Sir Keep your Creatures out of my sight. I’m an honest Woman Ma’m.” Jordan defends herself against Fitzherbert’s accusations by reminding her of her equally problematic position: “I Strumpet, Creature, Pickle, What if you have as many Thousands as I have hundreds why then, yow are the Greater W— Tho once I was a Cobbler’s Wife &c.” The whole scene is observed by the Prince Regent, pictured on the right in his signature red coat, and the Duke, who stands over his brother, reminding him that “Why you know George, we leaped the Broom as well as yow, & tho’ yow Palaver’d a good deal to Quiet the Lady’s Conscience why I did it with less Gammon thats all.”

Cruikshank uses the scene to suggest that legitimacy is all about public perception: Jordan comes from a more humble background and is therefore considered a

³² Jerrold tells us that Dorothy thought it no shame to wear the Duke’s picture at her breast at all times” (187). The inclusion of the miniature might also be an allusion to the famous portrait 1781 of Mary Robinson, the actress and the Duke of Wales’ former lover, as Perdita. In the portrait, Thomas Gainsborough depicts the cast-off mistress with a miniature of the Duke. For more on the portrait and its importance, see Engel, “Mary Robinson’s Gothic Celebrity” in *Fashioning Celebrity*.

“Strumpet” and a “Creature.” Conversely, Fitzherbert, because of her more affluent background, is called an “honest Woman” albeit satirically. The subtle distinction, which is possibly only apparent to Fitzherbert, is that Jordan is a workingwoman—an actress no less! Fitzherbert, meanwhile, had some claims to an aristocratic lineage.³³ Of course, Jordan’s work, her physical labor, is important to the piece’s argument for two reasons. First, her work on stage provided the majority of the couple’s income, and without it, the couple would not have been able to provide for their ever-expanding family while maintaining a lifestyle that was considered appropriate for a member of the royal family. Of course, any work would not be suitable for a legitimate wife of a prince or for a woman acting as the wife of prince, but Jordan’s stage work would have been viewed as particularly distasteful. The second reason here has already been alluded to: Jordan’s other work here is the physical labor of reproduction. Like her professional labor, Jordan’s reproductive labor is also depicted as doubly undignified since the act itself was not viewed as physical labor in the same ways as manual labor and the issues of the labor were themselves legally classified as illegitimates. By negating this work, Cruikshank in the guise of Fitzherbert voices a larger negation of Jordan’s status as a workingwoman in the public sphere as well as the kind of work available to women. Thus, while Cruikshank certainly paints an unflattering portrait of Fitzherbert, it is ultimately Jordan’s sudden rise in socio-economic class and questionable profession that makes Jordan a “dishonest” woman.

Moreover, while the politicization of the Jordan-Duke affair may not be readily apparent, the nationalist subtext to these overtly provocative caricatures provides yet

³³ For more on Fitzherbert and her relationship with the Duke, see Munson, *Maria Fitzherbert*.

another reason for the public's rejection of the relationship. Many of the most popular actors and actresses of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century hailed from Ireland and Scotland, and Jordan herself was the progeny of an aspiring but destitute Irish actress. Now, this poor, unwed, Irish mother was not only sharing the bed of someone who could potentially sit on the throne of England, but she was also bearing the next generation of royalty.

From a publicity perspective, Jordan and the Duke suffered from a lack of control over their popular image. They were scorned in the press as sexual deviants, social blunderers, and mismatched lovers. In fairness, however, we should observe that the perception of the Jordan-Duke affair was certainly viewed as part of a slanderous campaign against what was viewed by critics as a morally bankrupt royal family, and it was within this context that the perception illegitimacy most plagued the otherwise stable, monogamous, and happy couple.

1.6 The Actress' Thighs and Diseased Body Politic

To say that the royal family was experiencing some difficulty in maintaining a consistently virtuous and properly dignified public image at the end of the eighteenth century would be an understatement. The Regency Crisis of 1788 and its terrible foreshadowing of the King's later illness had cast a dim pallor over the royal household. Prince Fredrick's predilection towards card tables and horseraces was popular fodder for caricaturists and critics alike. Like his brother, the Prince Regent had a reputation for gambling and drinking, which left him perpetually in debt. In addition to his card playing, the Prince was known as profligate womanizer whose own short-lived affair with an actress, Maria Robinson, had consumed headlines and gossip columns for

months. Jordan and the Duke were just one symptom, caricaturists suggested, of a diseased royal family.

For some caricaturists, illegitimacy was a disease that plagued the entire royal family regardless of their social perception. Perhaps most indignant about the current state of the royals, Gillray takes the entire royal class to task for their less than regal behaviors. In *Vices Overlook'd in the New Proclamation* (1792), the caricaturist depicts the monarchy as a vice-ridden kyriarchy with Jordan's functioning as an honorary member of this diseased royal family. (Figure 1.8) The "new proclamation" Gillray refers to is the culture of vice promulgated by the royal family of George III. The caricature itself consists of four panels, each with a "vice" attached, specifically avarice,

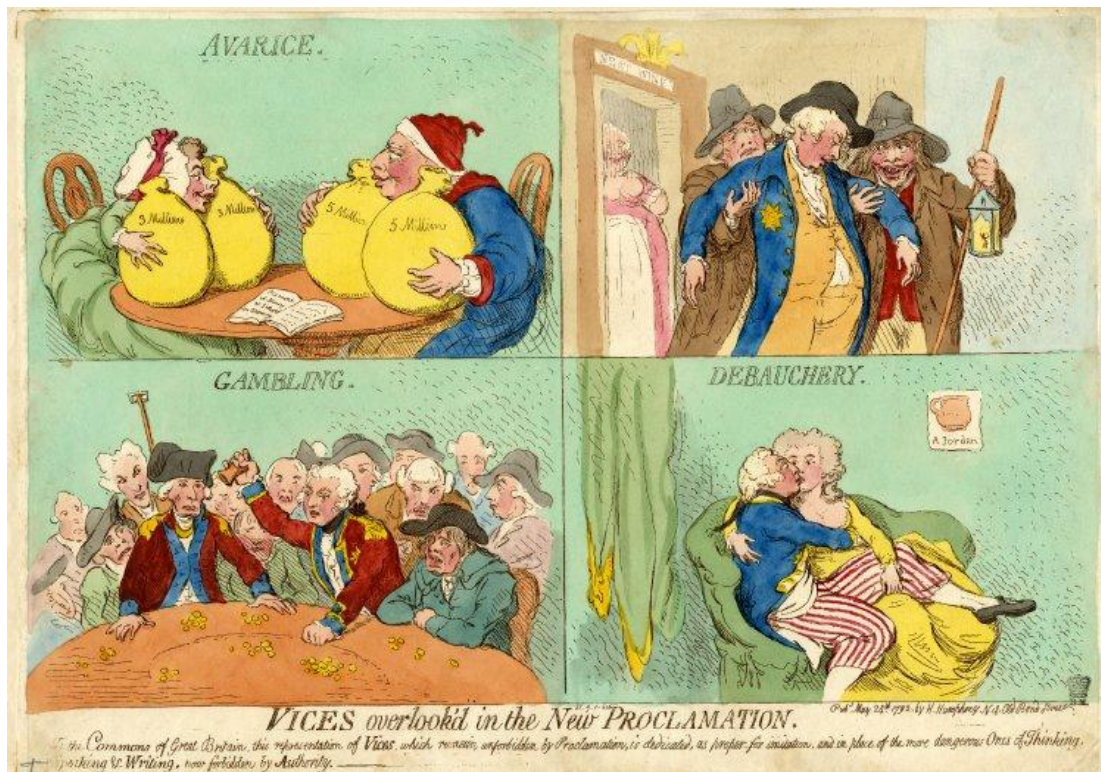


Figure 1.8 *Vices Overlook'd in the New Proclamation* by James Gillray. British Museum.

drunkenness, gambling, debauchery. Like scenes of a drama, each panel depicts a member of the royal family engaging in one of these vices: the King and the Queen sit opposite each other holding money bags; the Prince of Wales is escorted by two night watchman after an evening at a seedy tavern; and the Duke of York, a known gambler, is losing his inheritance at a gaming table. In the last vignette, Jordan and the Duke, signified by their signature hair and distinctive naval uniform, are depicted in an intimate embrace.

In the last vignette, Gillray portrays Jordan and the Duke in an unflattering and very intimate position. The Duke's hand suggestively on the actress's breast while Jordan pulls the Duke's leg betwixt her thighs. Gillray depicts Jordan, whose legs are invitingly open, as a wanton whore, and the groping Duke as her lecherous lover. A supposedly intimate moment made public turns Jordan's private life into a public spectacle. Gillray's provocative caricature asks the audience to question what kinds of "performing" Jordan does both onstage and off, and in this way, Jordan's body specifically and actresses' bodies generally become metaphors for excessive and grotesque behavior. Ultimately, it is this type of behavior, Gillray argues, that is sickening the physical, mental, and spiritual fabric of the royal family, leaving the reputation of the ruling class open to scrutiny and ridicule.

Gillray's work begs viewer to ask: if the royal family fails to set a positive behavioral example, whom should the public turn to? The answer is not forthcoming in a similarly themed work by George Cruikshank, *The Court of Love, or an Election in the Island of Borneo* (1812). (Figure 1.9) The Cruikshank's piece depicts the Prince Regent sitting on his dais in Carlton House while his newest mistress, Lady Hertford, sits on his

knee. Surrounding this illegitimate royal couple are the various royal and aristocratic couples seeking officers positions in this so- called “Court of Borneo.” Because this is the exotic, wild, and uncultivated court of “Borneo” rather than the proper, legitimate, and civilized court of the England, the Prince Regent chooses ministers based on their adulterous behaviors rather than their lineage or qualifications. Since adultery is the major qualification for the position; Jordan and the Duke are of course one of the petitioners pleading at the foot of the dais.

In the piece, Jordan, Duke, and the Fitzclarence brood stand on the Prince Regent’s extreme left where the Duke is signified his naval uniform and Jordan again is labeled by the presence of the nearby chamber pot containing her children, pleading on



Figure 1.9 *The Court of Love, or an Election in the Island of Borneo* by George Cruikshank. British Museum.

behalf of her and her family.³⁴ While the image could accidentally be perceived as a sympathetic to Jordan—she does petition the court on behalf of her children—Cruikshank positions the profligate Duke, his long-time mistress, and their ten illegitimate children as a drain on the already depleted public funds. The Duke, standing beside his *quasi*-wife, reminds the viewer of their illicit affair, saying, “I have lived in Adultery with an actress 25 years & have a pretty Number of illegitimate Children. I hope you will make me an Admiral of the Fleets.” The children are shown wading in a chamber pot, once the symbol of their mother and which now appears to function as the profane crest of their illegitimate family. Here, the Duke hopes to not only (literally) cash-in on his adulterous affair and illegitimate children but be rewarded for them.

The rampant vice the so-called “Court of Love” operating under the “New Proclamation” suggests that personal depravity, such as Jordan and the Duke’s extramarital affair, leads to public corruption. For caricaturists such as Isaac and George Cruikshank, William Dent, and James Gillray, Jordan embodied the depravity of the modern moment. They viewed Jordan’s theatrical forum and associated popular authority as an exponentially dangerous medium through which she could market her particular brand of illegitimacy. But her ability to draw crowds in Dublin, York, London, and Paris, was only half of sphere of influence. After withdrawing from the theatre, Jordan had the attention of the several of the most politically and socially influential persons in Britain, least among them her own lover. Hobnobbing with the royal family,

³⁴ These children all took the name FitzClarence and include George Augustus Frederick (1794-1842), Henry Edward (1795?-1817), Sophia (1796-1837), Mary (1798-1864), Frederick (1799-1854), Elizabeth (1801-1856), Adolphus (1802-1856), Augusta (1803-1865), Augustus (1805-1854), and Amelia (1807-1858).

Jordan not only increased her social standing, but her political one. And critics worried that her theatrical celebrity coupled with her personal affiliations would set a negative example for theatergoers and citizens alike. Through the popular medium of caricatures with its close ties to the theatre world, critics attempted to undermine Jordan's public reputation and hopefully, contain the threat Jordan posed.

1.7 Jordan's Highbrow/Lowbrow Celebrity

Caricaturists re-presented Jordan as the inverse of the "natural" woman through the indelible image of Nell; iconic image of the "public jordan"; the "shameful" depiction of adulterer; the caustic portrait of the "Creature"; and the scandalous portrayal of "debauchery." While Jordan had employed the medium of highbrow art to further her representation, her critics used the popular, lowbrow form of caricature to deconstruct it. The term "lowbrow" and its theoretical counterpart "highbrow" were made popular through Lawrence Levine's similarly titled study *Highbrow/Lowbrow*. Levine himself borrows these terms from the late nineteenth century and the study of phenomenology: "highbrow" literally referred to those individuals with high foreheads who were presumed to be intellectuals; "lowbrow" referred to those individuals with low, often sloping foreheads who were presumed to be unintelligent.

While these terms are used to define ideas relating to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "high" and "low" were certainly used as aesthetic terms in the eighteenth century. For instance, the acclaimed father of caricature, William Hogarth, attempted to distance himself from the "low" medium of caricature, saying, "I have ever considered the knowledge of character, either high or low, to be the most sublime part of the art of painting or sculpture; and caricature as the lowest" (qtd. in Rauser 43). Of course,

Hogarth himself aspired to be viewed as a serious artist and a purveyor of “high” art, which meant distinguishing himself from the often coarsely drawn, exaggerated figures of the eighteenth-century caricature. For while Hogarth may appreciate the “high or low” character, he does not appreciate the “lowest” form of art: caricature. Hogarth’s use of “high” and “low,” like Levine’s modern counterparts, were used to connote not only class, but also aesthetic and cultural value.

It is this concept of value based on class and aesthetic judgment that the terms “lowbrow” and “highbrow” offer to a discussion of the ways this medium effectively transformed Jordan’s popular image. Despite Jordan’s reputation as the “natural” actress, Jordan’s offstage activities contradicted the public intimacy engendered by the portrait. Her affairs with several men, foremost among them the royal son, and her troupe of illegitimate children certainly defied the traditional narratives about eighteenth-century women as chaste daughters and dutiful wives. The seeming disparity between Jordan’s image as the Comic Muse and what her critics argued was her “real” persona lead caricaturists to paint the actress as a hypocrite. Jordan, who had been the subject of many highbrow portraits, used the aesthetic and cultural clout of these works to frame herself as an authentic subject for representation.

Jordan’s critics, conversely, drew upon the medium’s negative aesthetic and cultural associations to undermine Jordan’s authenticity. Caricaturists such as Dent and Gillray, for instance, used *ad hominem* attacks to chastise the actress for failing to live according to her marketed image of the female ideal. Indeed, they insinuated that she was challenging her onstage image in her offstage activities. Some such as Dent and Isaac Cruickshank depicted Jordan as a platform for their own beliefs about legitimate

and illegitimate activities. Others like George Cruikshank and Gillray portrayed Jordan's illegitimate affair with the Duke to suggest that Jordan's personal depravity was connected to her theatrical and political ties and *vice versa*. Jordan's personal profligacy, according to these caricaturists, set a negative example, not only for theatrical admirers but also for the London public writ large. These artists inverted the concept of public intimacy by presenting Jordan's most private moments for public scrutiny, turning them into the spectacle of intimacy-in-public. The "public jordan," they showed, was full of the excrement of modern life, and containing all the excess of society was the figure of Dorothy Jordan.

1.8 Dueling Legacies: Reconstructing a Celebrity Image

While critics vehemently opposed Jordan and the Duke's affair, it was not criticism that ultimately drove the two apart. Rather, the demise of the Fitzclarence family ended as many relationships do: in a fight over money. As an unmarried prince, the Duke could only ask parliament for small salary, and Jordan's stage work was hardly enough to keep them and the children in their palatial estate at Bushy House. To assist with his financial struggles, the Duke had been actively seeking other financial possibilities, namely in the form of wealthy lovers with little progress.

The immediacy of the Duke's finances, not to mention the illegitimacy of all of his heirs, came to a head in 1811, when the Duke's brother, the Prince of Wales, was named the Prince Regent by an act of Parliament—The Regency Act 1811—after his father had taken seriously ill and presumed not to recover. According to Jordan's biographer, Claire Tomlin, the naming of the Prince Regent fundamentally changed the Duke's relationship with Jordan:

Then, when his brother became Regent and took stock of the situation of the whole family, he almost certainly encouraged the Duke to think about changing his situation. There were financial incentives: Parliament would grant more money to a married prince. There were also dynastic ones: the royal family could do with some more legitimate children, there being still only the one—Princess Charlotte—in the younger generation. (Tomalin 241)

The Duke decided to take the Regent's advice and broke off his relationship with Jordan in order to pursue more financially and politically promising companions.³⁵ Jordan found herself a cast-off mistress, left without the means to provide for herself or her many children. The Duke arranged for Jordan to keep custody over the younger sons and their daughters, but the older boys would prepare for their careers with the military. Henry FitzClarence, the second son of the royal couple, was in the Navy when he learned of his parent's split. Henry wrote to his elder brother, George, about how ill-treated his mother had been at the hands of their father:

...were he not my father I could and would say more...My God! To think that our father should have done such a thing...if this be true I will never more go home except once to see my Dear Mother whom I consider a Most Injured Woman... I could not believe my eyes when I saw the paper which contained Distressing truth I scarcely know how I write I am nearly mad I think I shall run away home [...].
(qtd. in Tomalin 251)

³⁵ Jordan was not necessarily opposed to the Duke seeking out more politically and financially sound matches: "The truth is, Dora did offer him some advice on his wooing of Miss [Catherine Tylney-Long]; there is a curious letter from her in which she warns him to 'be cautious for fear of a disappointment. All women are not to be taken by an open attack, and a premeditated one stands a worse chance than any other'" (Tomalin 245). The Duke did propose to Miss Long, but was refused.

The Duke promised Jordan an annuity, but it was paid sporadically. With limited income, Jordan, who was planning on retiring in the spring of 1811 at the age of fifty, decided to postpone her retirement from the stage indefinitely.³⁶ In the summer of 1812, Jordan, finding her stage salary unable to cover her family's expenses, returned the remaining children to the Duke in the hope that they would receive a better education than she could provide. But the stage would not support her for long: Jordan's health was deteriorating just as quickly as her debts were increasing. Jordan, after all, was not the spry starlet of her London debut and her acting was declining as fast as her health. Driven to France to avoid debt collectors, the (in)famous actress died in 1816 a Parisian hotel alone and penniless.

The former starlet's rather desperate death seemed a cruel ending to a woman once hailed as the "child of nature," and while many of her critics had been quick to disparage the actress-turned-mistress, some of them felt moved enough to come to her defense. For instance, Cruikshank's *Cl—ce's Dream; or, Binnacle Billy receiving an unwelcome visit from e/y other world* (1821) features a ghostly Jordan haunting the newly remarried Duke. (Figure 1.10) The caricature depicts Jordan—or rather her ghost—in a sympathetic light by rewriting the narrative of corruption surrounding the affair. In this new narrative, it is not Jordan, but the Duke who is the ultimate symbol of debauchee. The content of this caricature would certainly be enough to suggest that even her most staunch critics found her ultimate reputation as a royal harlot distasteful, but it is the

³⁶Jordan was not necessarily opposed to the Duke seeking out more politically and financially sound matches: "The truth is, Dora did offer him some advice on his wooing of Miss [Catherine Tylney-Long]; there is a curious letter from her in which she warns him to 'be cautious for fear of a disappointment. All women are not to be taken by an open attack, and a premeditated one stands a worse chance than any other'" (Tomalin 245).



Figure 1.10 *CL—CE's Dream; or, Binnacle Billy receiving an unwelcome visit from e/y other world* by Isaac Cruikshank. British Museum.

timing of the piece that is particularly enlightening. Published in 1821, the caricature was produced five years after Jordan's death, and thus, was not an immediate defense of the actress, a reaction to her death, or the scandal of her burial by charity. It was also not a direct reaction to the Duke's marriage since the royal couple would have already been buried for three years by the time of publication. Rather, the piece appears to be a response to the actress' legacy as the Duke's mistress rather than the renowned and beloved actress who was hailed for her comedic genius and the spontaneity of her natural talent.

This publicly wrong woman appears as the focus of the caricature, demanding to speak on behalf of her tarnished legacy. Evidence of the Duke's wrong-doings appear throughout the piece, but none are more prominent than the sad, ghostly figure that

appears at the foot of his bed still standing in her coffin inscribed, “Buried by Subscription in Paris.” The inscription alludes to the circumstances surrounding Jordan’s death in France in 1816. Neither the Duke nor any of their children paid for the funeral, and the once-beloved actress was left to the charity of a foreign country to provide a proper burial—a crime of incivility and callous for which the Cruikshank seems to demand retribution. In the caricature, the forgotten Jordan chastises her frightened former lover: “‘False, fleeting perjured Cl....ce’! awake wretch! and behold the unhappy victim of thy avarice and debauchery. My untombed bones in a foreign land buried by the charity of strangers, call aloud for vengeance [sic], Awake thou Slanderer never more to sleep!’”³⁷ According to the ghostly figure, the actress was the “unhappy victim” of the Duke’s “avarice and debauchery.”

This ghostly Jordan certainly appears in direct contrast to the delusional “Nell,” the vacuous “public jordan,” or the ghastly “creature” of previous caricatures. Instead, Cruikshank labels her as the “victim” of a royal son and a royal family whose diseased morality corrupted the “child of nature.” Indeed, Jordan’s sympathetic and defenseless ghost more closely recalls Hoppner’s portrait of the Jordan as the Comic Muse who is in dire need of defense against the lecherous satyr. Here, it appears that Cruickshank himself is undertaking the duties of Euphrosyne by defending the post-mortem reputation of this tragic heroine. The Duke, in this analogy, takes on the guise of the satyr whose love of “avarice and debauchery” has defiled the defenseless Jordan. Of course, this comparison is only fitting since the satyr in Hoppner’s portrait symbolizes the lustful male theatregoer, and the Duke was one of those lustful male theatregoers. Thus, the

³⁷The first part of Jordan’s speech is an allusion to Clarence’s monologue in act 1, scene 4, from Shakespeare’s *Richard III*: “Clarence is come—false, fleeting, perjured Clarence.”

Duke becomes the ultimate “slanderer” of Jordan’s good name, and the cause of her fall from social grace.

Beyond the obvious incorporation of Jordan and the Duke, Cruickshank imbeds several critiques about the Duke throughout the piece including the infamous chamber pot first used by Gillray and Dent. The Duke calls out for mercy: “Ah! I have done those things that now give evidence against my Soul, O spare me, Oh! Oh!—” In the midst of his horror over the appearance of his former lover, the Duke overturns a chamber pot labeled “Jordan,” spilling its contents over several scrolls including “The Royal Navy” and “Affair [of] State.” These now-soiled papers represent the way the Duke has tarnished not just his reputation but the reputation of the Royal Navy and the State itself by first engaging in this illegitimate relationship and then by not properly seeing to his former mistress’ burial. The inclusion of the chamber pot becomes representative of the Duke’s mishandling of his relationship with the actress as well as her continued spoiling of the royal name. Cruickshank’s decision to include the chamber pot in a supposed sympathetic portrayal of Jordan suggests the potency of such iconography and the “haunting” nature of celebrity scandal.

While Cruickshank’s sympathetic portrait of Jordan demanded “vengeance” from the Duke, it would take ten more years for a satisfactory reply from the actress’ defamed former lover. A decade after Cruickshank published *Cl—ce’s Dream*, the Duke, now King of England, addressed such accusations made by the caricaturists and others regarding his affair with Jordan. The King wanted to celebrate the embattled Jordan who, throughout not only their relationship but also her entire life, had been targeted as a social climber and a wanton whore. Perhaps feeling remorse for his mistreatment of the woman he saw

as a wife, the King called upon Francis Chantrey—a renowned sculptor who worked closely with the royal family—to create the memorial that was to be placed in Westminster Abbey “beside the monuments of Queens” (Tomalin 2). He was interested in resurrecting Jordan’s tainted popular reputation borne from a lifetime of engaging in questionable activities both inside the theatre and in his bed.

Bastardizing the kind of public intimacy depicted by Hoppner, the caricaturists had appropriated the defenseless portrayed by Jordan and transmogrified it into the grotesque image of the chamber pot. Jordan had made a public moment private while caricaturists made Jordan’s private moments with the Duke public. The forced publicity of the private relationship, rather than contribute to Jordan’s intimacy with her public, robbed her the intimacy that had accompanied her portrait where a public moment was portrayed as private. It is unsurprising, then, that the Duke’s monument to Jordan would be an attempt to re-appropriate the kind of intimacy in Hoppner’s portrait by undercutting the forced intimacy-in-public foisted on her by the caricaturists.

Taking the idea of public intimacy to the opposite extreme from what the caricaturists had done, the Duke’s vision for the monument combated the popular image of Jordan as a social-climbing opportunist by portraying her as the image of archetypal woman: a mother. The monument itself depicts Jordan as a seated figure with a small child sleeping on her lap and another small child grabbing at her side. (Figure 1.10) Both children appear to be completely content, and Jordan herself intently watches the young child in her arms. The child’s hand gently pulls on the left shoulder of her dress, partially



Figure 1.11 *Mrs. Jordan's Monument* by Francis Chantrey. British Royal Collection.

exposing her breast, as if she was about to feed the cradled infant. Draped in a loose fitting dress and her hair tumbling down the side of her neck, the monument reconstructs the “naturalness” Jordan exuded on stage. The only allusion to her work on the stage amid all these signifiers of motherhood is the mask of comedy subtly placed at the statue’s feet. Given this powerful portrayal of her domestic life, it is fair to say that it was her position as a mother and *quasi*-wife rather than her position as an actress that the King wished to memorialize.

The Duke’s monument to Jordan bespeaks a larger desire to re-vision not only the figure of the public woman but also that of the political woman. What we see in the Duke’s monument to Jordan is a much different vision of political power and public influence one not unlike the image of public intimacy defined by Jordan and Hoppner in *The Comic Muse*. The Duke re-visions the public woman as a symbol of humility rather

than power, a harbinger of the private sphere's triumph over the public. The Duke resurrected Jordan as a traditional, even classical, portrait of femininity. When we contrast this monument with the caricatures, what we see is a genealogy of performance where women are cast as both sexual and maternal and where performances are both physical and theatrical.³⁸

Moreover, the monument also provides viewers with a statement about nationalism and how nationalism relates it relates to discussions of femininity and motherhood. In the caricatures, Jordan's femininity, and I would argue subjective, is completely stripped away in favor of exposing her sexuality and presenting her as a sexual deviant. Even when Jordan is presented as a mother in the caricatures, her maternal identity, like her femininity, is reduced to a grotesque and monstrous bodily function. In the monument, however, the Duke restores Jordan's femininity by emphasizing her identity as a mother. Jordan becomes not just any mother, but the mother of royalty to placed in the same hall as the other mothers of the nation. Certainly, we can read this as a personal statement of the Duke's personal admiration and love for the dead Jordan, but it also a powerful political statement: Jordan, the unwed mother of over a dozen illegitimate children who was herself an illegitimate child born to an poor Irish actress, was now the mother of the next generation of royalty. In elevating Jordan to the place beside the English queens, the Duke offers his subject a symbol of British nationalism in the form of a poor, illegitimate, Irish bastard woman.

Of course, the fates would intervene in the King's plan to memorialize his deceased mistress. While it was fairly common for popular actors and actresses to be

³⁸For more on the genealogy of performance, see Román, "The Afterlife of Sarah Siddons," pgs. 163-174.

memorialized at Westminster, none of them were to be memorialized beside Britain's queens.³⁹ Westminster denied the King's request to place Jordan in the Queens' section or, indeed, in the church at all. The Dean of Westminster would not have Jordan who was known not only for her acting but also for her extramarital affair with the future King. The adulterous nature of the affair coupled with the fact that together they produced a veritable troupe of illegitimate children caused no small controversy. Westminster would not house the statue. In fact, the King could not find anyone who was willing to take it and *Mrs. Jordan's Monument* sat in Chantrey's studio abandoned and eventually, forgotten.⁴⁰ The King's attempt to resurrect the image of Dorothy Jordan, wresting it away from the popular press, had failed.

Westminster's rejection of *Mrs. Jordan's Monument* demonstrates the damning consequences of unmitigated access a celebrity's personal life and the utter collapse of a celebrity's illusive intimacy. Jordan's inability to control and protect her reputation as the "child of nature" while maintaining an intimacy with the public reflects the power of the eighteenth-century media industry to revise, manufacture, and distort a celebrity's popular image. With the increasing circulation of celebrity images in the late eighteenth century, a celebrity's ability to completely control their image was compromised by

³⁹ Several actors and actresses from the eighteenth century are memorialized in Westminster: Thomas Betterton (d. 1710), Anne Oldfield (d. 1730), Barton Booth (d. 1733), Hannah Pritchard (d. 1768), David Garrick (d. 1779). The Dean of Westminster, Samuel Horsley, refused to have actress Katherine "Kitty" Clive buried at the abbey: "if we do not draw some line in this theatrical ambition to mortuary fame, we shall soon make Westminster Abbey little better than a Gothic Green Room!" (*The Times*, 26 March 1796, 3).

⁴⁰ The monument became the property of the Fitzclarence family—Jordan and the Duke's children—until 1980 when the 5th Earl of Munster presented it to the Queen. *Mrs. Jordan's Monument* was accepted into the royal collection—more than 160 years after Jordan's death—and it currently resides in Buckingham Palace where, one might say, it finally resides "beside the monuments of Queens."

equally powerful narratives spun in the popular press. The circulation of celebrity images resulted in increased access to a beloved celebrity-object, an access, which in Jordan's case, proved caustic to her popular reputation and her public intimacy turned into the uncomfortable, grotesque, and lewd intimacy-in-public. By juxtaposing unauthorized images of Jordan with authorized ones, caricatures, much like their modern counterparts in tabloids, distort the concept of public intimacy by creating a simulacrum of that once illusive relationship.

Ultimately, Jordan's illegitimacy was grounded in the perception that she had somehow rupture the sacred trust between audience and celebrity that she was somehow not the "child of nature" that she appeared to be on stage. Critics capitalized on what appeared to be fundamental break between perceived reality and reality itself by exposing the illegitimacy of Jordan's private life. Once framed by this scandal, Jordan became symbolic of a disease royal family and the unacceptable, though progressive, ideas about sexuality, marriage, family, and femininity. Jordan's untraditional life dared to question the established institutions of British polite society. By containing her through the label of illegitimacy, critics hoped to undermine her very popular and public lifestyle, and for most of Jordan's professional life, this containment worked. The actress' public relationship was haunted by her affair with the Duke and her celebrity-persona became an uneasy paradox between the "child of nature" and the "public" Jordan, and turned her into the naturally unnatural Dorothy Jordan.

Chapter Two: I-doll-ized: William Henry West Betty and the Appeal of Thingness

From his debut in 1803 until his retirement in 1806, the child actor, William Henry West Betty, popularly called Master Betty, was the idol of the British nation, rivaling, some claimed, Napoleon in power and influence.⁴¹ Admirers believed Betty to be the reincarnation of acting legends like Roscius and David Garrick, while others claimed him far superior to all his theatrical predecessors even going as far as to argue that he was a celestial being descended to the London stage from on high.⁴² The object of this blasphemous worship was Betty's young, attractive body, and like desperate penitents, admirers flocked to performances, rioted over tickets, and overwhelmed venues just for a glimpse of his "pleasing" mouth, "pliant" limbs, and "abundant" tresses. Lucky were the few who found themselves backstage in time to kiss the hemline of his costume

⁴¹ Elledge records the portraitist James Northcote as writing that Betty and Napoleon "now divide the world" (87).

⁴² Roscius is an allusion to the Roman actor, Quintus Roscius Gallus, who gained a reputation as a paradigm for dramatic excellence in the Renaissance.

much like a disciple would do to the robes of a saint. Luckier still were those who were there in time to watch as the young idol was being stripped and rubbed down by his adult attendants. For those who did not receive such private, personal access, Betty's ethereal body was available for public worship on the many stages in around London and on canvases and in showrooms of the period's most famous portraitists. For those wanting a more personal relationship with Betty, they could purchase any number of miniatures, prints, coins, and figurines that made the absent, untouchable idol more present and tangible.

The sexual energy surrounding Betty was not an unprecedented phenomenon. Players had been conceived in these same idolatrous terms throughout the eighteenth century, and actresses especially were described according to their abilities to elicit physical and sexual desire in their audiences.⁴³ Indeed, celebrity, as theorized by Joseph Roach and Felicity Nussbaum, requires some illusion of sexual availability, or public intimacy, to perpetuate itself.⁴⁴ Like his adult counterparts, Betty's celebrity also depended on his ability to use his body to attract his audience, to make them want him, and to make them feel wanted by him in return. Of course, the problem that Betty and other child celebrities like him introduce into the public intimacy paradigm is the possibility of illegitimate desire. The social stigma attached to the sexual desire of children fundamentally undermines public intimacy, transmogrifying celebrity worship into the blasphemous heresy of sexual deviance.

⁴³ The sexual discourses surrounding actors and actresses in the eighteenth-century has been well documented. For the most influential works on this study, see Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity*, Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*, and Straub, *Sexual Suspects*.

⁴⁴ See Roach, pg. 4; Nussbaum, pgs. 16-19.

Examining the relationship between Betty and his admirers, this chapter will focus on questions of public intimacy as it relates to child actors: how does public intimacy function when we talk about child actors? Do child actors subvert, change, and use this paradigm? How did nineteenth-century spectators grapple with the typical discourse of celebrity sexual attraction when it came to child actors? How do modern scholars discuss the simultaneous attraction and repulsion to celebrity actors? How do these actors complicate our discussions about gender, sexuality, and celebrity in the early nineteenth century?

The popular reception and expectation of the child actor have changed very little since Bettymania first infected the British isles. Child actors in the nineteenth century faced harsh criticism in the court of public opinion based on detractors believed was the public's thirst for novelty over talent. Adult critics often viewed nineteenth century child actors with disgust and animosity. Laurence Hutton, a theatre historian, argues that Betty and other "Infant Phenomena" amount to little more than novelty acts: "he does not educate the masses, he does not advance art, he does nothing which it is the high aim of the legitimate actor to do, he does not even amuse" (299-300). Why the hostility toward "Infant Phenomena"? Scholars have posited that the answer to this question lies in the complicated and conflicted discourse surrounding children and childhood throughout the nineteenth century.

Research about the child actor in the nineteenth century has generally focused on the changing ideas about children and childhood in both the Romantic and Victorian eras. Positioning young actors within emerging labor discourses, Viviana A. Rotman Zelizer has examined how the labor of these child workers was virtually erased because of the

types of roles they performed.⁴⁵ According to Zelizer, child actors presented a particular labor problem in nineteenth-century society: “the enthusiasm and the consternation over child actors were tied to the cultural redefinition of the economic and sentimental roles of children. Children on the stage created a curious paradox; they were child laborers paid to represent the new, sentimentalized view of children. They worked to portray the useless child” (95). The sentimentalized view of children in the nineteenth century certainly intensified public scrutiny of child actors like Betty and forced audiences to question their very definitions of children and childhood. What we see underlying Zelizer’s labor paradox is the problematic position of the child performing the adult performing the child.

In the case of Betty and other child actors like him, the young performer was being asked to “act” like an adult—performing adult roles in adult casts and in a polished way—while still maintaining their sense of youthful naturalness and unpracticed genius. As a result, child actors often represent a challenge to ingrained notions of childhood and the binary of child and adult. The paradoxical performance of the child actors, as Marah Gubar has suggested, questions the assumptions audiences bring to such performances and the ways those assumptions are fundamentally undermined by the young performer. Examining the types of roles child actors performed in the nineteenth century, including those performed by Betty, Gubar views these performers not as the “talentless victims of adult voyeurism,” but rather as using their “prematurely developed and much-vaunted versatility” in order to “blur the line between child and adult, innocence and experience” (64). Like Gubar and Zelizer, Katharine Kittridge provides a unique insight into the conflicting views of the child prodigies in the culture write large by describing how they

⁴⁵For more see Zelizer, especially pgs. 89-96.

were “lauded for their premature mastery while being condemned for their audacity in appropriating an adult role.” By challenging the definitions of child and adult, young actors in the nineteenth century often found themselves in the liminal space between immaturity and maturity, child and adult.

Because of their liminal position, child celebrities like Betty are often greeted with some suspicion by adult actors, actresses, and critics. Exploring the social construction of child stars from the nineteenth century through the present, Jane O’Connor offers several connections between historical figures like Betty and modern child stars, including, “the incongruity of being a performing child with being a ‘normal’ child”; “the fundamental importance to the audience of a child’s performance being ‘natural’”; and “the uncomfortable association of performing children with child sexuality” (46-47). While all of O’Connor’s characteristics of child actors certainly influenced the public’s reception of Betty, the “uncomfortable association” surrounding Betty’s sexuality and the sexuality of Betty’s audiences most prominently framed Betty’s popular reception. Betty’s body, rife with complicated and conflicting signifiers of sex and gender, became the battle ground for detractors and admirers alike to battle with their own ideas of childhood, gender, and sexuality.⁴⁶

Child actors like Betty forced audiences to experience the uncomfortable position between attraction and repulsion. Because of the complexity of spectators’ attraction to Betty, much of the critical attention surrounding Betty has focused on the young actor’s sexuality. While the existence of this sexual attraction can hardly be denied, scholars have questioned the nature of Betty’s sexual appeal. Julie Carlson’s study of the “queer

⁴⁶Kincaid’s *Child-Loving* offers an interesting overview of the child, gender, and sexuality in late nineteenth-century culture.

stage of youth,” for instance, examines “how quickly publics turn on actors when the sexuality of youth becomes public rather than remaining latent” (162). The queerness attached to the Betty’s spectators is also an ongoing theme in Kahan’s study of Bettymania. He devotes several sections of his biography to Betty’s knowledge of his sexual attraction, the reception of sexuality among men and women, and possible pedophilic desires among some of his admirers.⁴⁷ For Kahan, the erotic and often problematic nature of Betty’s appeal is obvious: “men and women who would cringe at being called aberrant, anomalous, atypical, or just plain kinky were unashamedly interested and oddly aroused by Master Betty” (27). But what is so “oddly arousing” about the young actor and how does the idea of “odd” arousal speak to the complicated, conflicting, and downright problematic sexual overtones of Betty’s popular reception?

This chapter will examine ideas about sexuality and the child celebrity, but unlike Kahan and Carlson, I am interested in the public response to the implicit threat of “odd” arousal, and the mechanisms admirers used to undermine the taint of illegitimate desire. While there were a few instances where pederasty might have occurred, the mere threat of being labeled a sexual deviant put Betty’s admirers on the defensive. His adult supporters combated the perception of illegitimacy by framing him in ways more commonly ascribed to dolls and doll play. In a process I am calling i-doll-ization, Betty’s admirers sometimes literally and sometimes metaphorically transformed the young boy into a doll. I-doll-ization allowed his admirers to explain, justify, and rationalize their own attraction to the prepubescent boy. Because the object of their desire was essentially a thing, they were able to recuse themselves from any accusations of deviant lust.

⁴⁷See especially, pgs. 115-123.

Using the idea of “idol” to frame my discussion, this chapter examines the ways in which child actors become objects for public desire and the consequences of their objectification. While I am using idol here to explain the particular process of objectification as it relates to Betty, it is important to note that scholars of the celebrity studies have examined similar processes. In *Cities of the Dead*, Roach defines “effigy” in much the same way I using this definition of idol as a “noun meaning a sculpted or pictured likeness” (36). Roach also theorizes effigy, especially a funeral effigy, in *It* as “an image thus synthesized as an idea, here called an effigy, will very likely have only a coincidental relationship to the identity of the actual human person whose peculiar attraction triggered the hunger for the experience in the first place” (17). Roach’s emphasis on the coincidental relationship between the image and the person is particularly important in understanding why Betty was described, depicted, and treated like an object for sexual desire and arousal. As the chapter will detail, Betty himself was not just viewed in relationship to his image, but that his failure to reflect his own image would result in his ultimate public rejection. In the following chapter, I will describe how nineteenth-century spectators grappled with their attraction and repulsion to Betty; how art, criticism, and other media contributed to his i-doll-ization; and what studying Betty’s popular reception tells us about the role of attraction in legitimizing and delegitimizing a celebrity figure.

2.1 A Person So Adored: The Cult of Betty

Betty’s London debut at Covent Garden on December 1, 1804 was noteworthy not only for the young boy’s rousing performance, but also for the sensational fashion in which he made his formal entrance into London theatre. The conditions outside the

theatre were best described as riotous as depicted in Charles Williams' *Vain Attempt to see the Young Roscius* (1805). (Figure 2.1) The caricaturist captures the utter frenzy of the situation as the men and women push each other in every direction presumably towards the unseen theatre. The man on the left cries to the ramble that "The Pit has been full this half-hour!" but his words go unheeded by the masses. The commotion appears to overtake the good senses of the crowd, but not their good manners. Several of the persons help to find and return lost articles of clothing that had been apparently pulled off

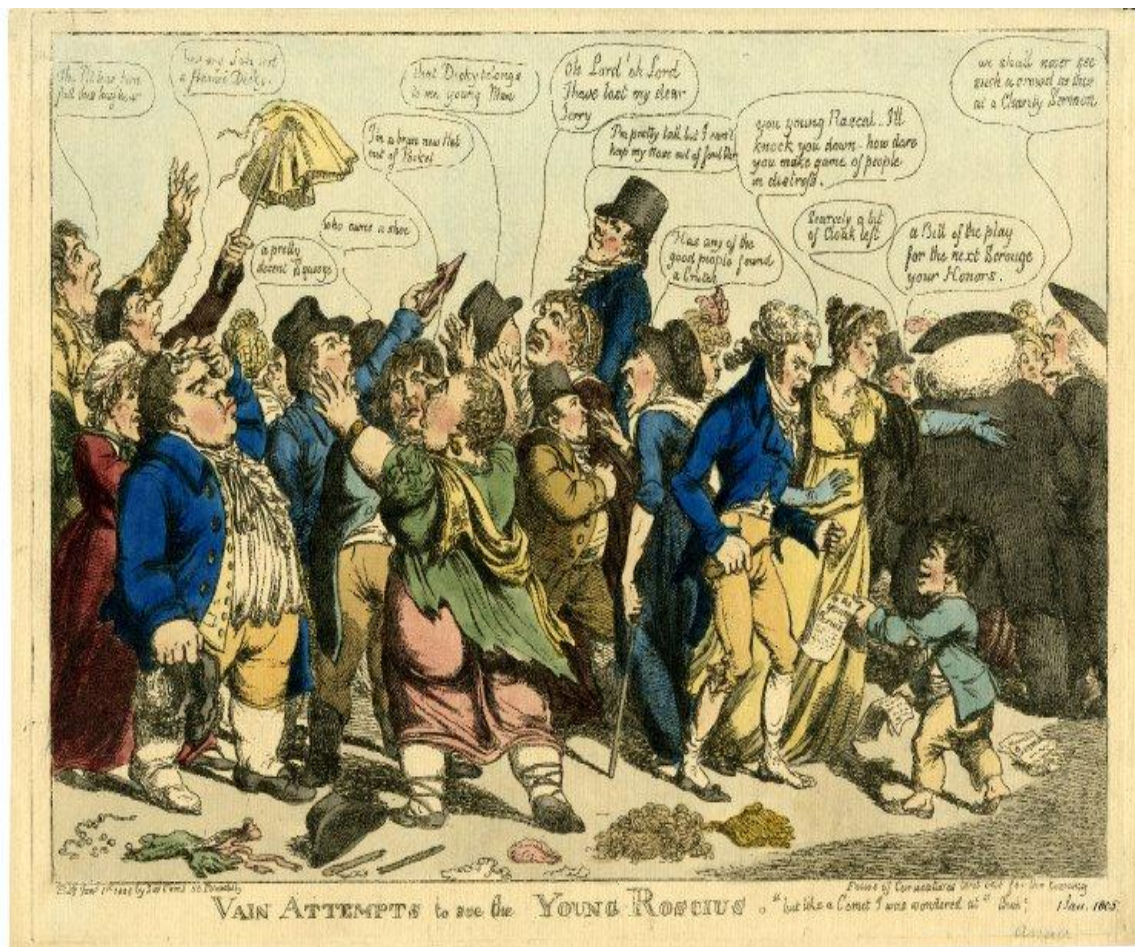


Figure 2.1 *Vain Attempt to see the Young Roscius* by Charles Williams. British Museum.

in the fruitless endeavor: a man cries “has any Lady lost a flannel Dicky” and a woman whose dress has been torn half off as well as her wig answers, “that Dicky belongs to me young Man!” One woman even bemoans, “I have lost my dear Jerry!” Others in the crowd cry about losing shoes, crutches, and cloaks, and the entire foreground is littered with fashionable detritus including a hat, wig, and necklace. Some of the would-be theatregoers comment on ridiculousness of the situation itself. One particularly tall man at the center exclaims, “I’m pretty tall, but I can’t keep my Nose out of foul Air.” Another old man, perhaps a wink and a nod to the viewer, chastises a young boy crying, “how dare you make game of people in distress.”

While Williams’ interpretation of the scene appears to be a hyperbole of the actual events, eyewitness accounts corroborate the same tumultuous circumstances surrounding the young boy’s first London appearance. One person recounted the lengths to which some were willing to go just to see Betty perform on opening night: “The pit was nearly two-thirds filled by gentlemen who paid box-price, rushed in, and leaped over the balconies; when it was filled these unplaced intruders lawlessly fixed themselves in the seats of others who had secured them weeks before” (Fitzgerald 433). Once the players had taken the stage, however, conditions became increasingly more desperate as the heat and the excitement began to take its toll on the crammed patrons. The reporter from *The Ipswich Journal* records the utter pandemonium inside the theatre: “In the pit many gentlemen fainted, and were dragged up seemingly lifeless, into the boxes. The ladies in two or three of the boxes were employed almost the whole time in fanning the gentlemen who were beneath them in the pit. Frequently we heard screams from those who were overcome by the heat, but could neither get out, nor obtain the slightest relief;

we observed several raising their hands, as if in the act of supplication for help.”⁴⁸ With one performance, Bettymania had infected London and it seemed that few were immune to the fashionable illness.

Not unlike modern-day teen idols, Betty was both adored and despised among the fashionable circles, but whether he was being admonished or admired, the young sensational was the topic of much conversation. According to theatre historian, Edward Stirling, Betty was London’s hottest commodity: “He became the rage of the town, the idol of the fair—admired by men and women alike” (172). One need only to peruse the myriad of biographies, memoirs, and sketches that flooded the literary market as many writers hoped to cash in on the “Young Roscius” franchise to see that Betty was certainly a celebrity.⁴⁹ Indeed, the famed actor William Macready records how Betty “engrossed all tongues” and even one of his staunchest critics reluctantly admitted “Young Betty, the Roscius that had been, was our first star” (23). Admirers were willing to go to extreme measures for just of the opportunity of being close to the object of their infatuation. One contemporary writer describes how night after night filled boxes often left spectators “ungratified”: “The theatre, too small, did suffocate/Its squeezed contents, and more than

⁴⁸ *The Ipswich Journal*, December 8, 1804

⁴⁹ Betty biographers include Kahan in *Bettymania*; Norton in “William Henry West Betty, Romantic Child Actor”; and Playfair in *The Prodigy*. Biographical entries about Betty are also included by Brander, *Actors and Actresses of Great Britain*, vol. 2; Genest, *History of the Stage*, vol. 7, especially pgs. 650-663. Altick’s “The Marvelous Child of the English Stage” and Slout and Rudisill’s “The Enigma of the Master Betty Mania” also include brief biographical accounts of Betty as well as a synopsis of Bettymania. In addition to modern studies, Betty’s contemporaries produced an astounding number of biographical accounts. Lowe’s *A Bibliographical Account of English Theatrical Literature*, for instance, has seventeen entries for Betty. To this list, we can also add: *An Authentic Sketch of the Life of William Henry West Betty*; *Memoirs and Interesting Anecdotes of the Young Roscius*; and Democritus’ *The Young Roscius Dissected*.

it admitted/Did sigh at their exclusion, and return/Ungratified; for BETTY there, the *Boy*,
 /Did strut and storm and straddle, stamp and stare,/And show the world how Garrick did
 not act” (qtd. in Fitzgerald 37). Charles Macready, Betty’s friend and fellow theatrical,
 recounted how one woman from “one of the leading families in the country” was so taken
 with the young actor that she “begged and entreated the landlord” for a glimpse at Master
 Betty and that she would “give anything” to get her wish (12). The old stager tells us and
 being “unwilling to disoblige his patrons” told the woman that ““Mr. and Mrs. Betty and
 their son were just going to dinner, and if she chose to carry in one of the dishes she
 could see him, but there was no other way.’ The lady, very grateful in her
 acknowledgments, took the dish, and made one of the waiters at table” (12). Royalty,
 too, were interested in being personally acquainted with the boy who admirers claimed
 was “Cooke, Kemble, Holman, Garrick, all in one” (qtd. in Doran 2:297). In addition to
 the King and Queen, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Clarence both had made
 introductions to the young boy, and Anna Seward recalls how “Cumbeys,” Richard
 Cumberland, “writhes under the fame of the young Roscius, and avows the mortification
 it cost him to see Master Betty, as in scorn he terms him, going to rehearsal in a coach
 that bore a ducal coronet!” (6: 309-310). From aristocratic waitresses to the King and
 Queen of England, everyone wanted to meet the “infant phenomenon.”⁵⁰

According to Betty’s admirers, the root of their fierce attraction to the young boy
 was his innate acting genius or as they called it his “natural genius.” John Doran, for
 instance, cites a “contemporary account” that describes how “Nature has endowed him

⁵⁰Audiences knew of Betty’s favour with the King and Queen as well as the Prince of Wales who,
 Macready tells us, made “him handsome presents” (12). Betty’s reputation as a favoured plaything among
 the royals would have contributed to his status as a prized commodity.

with genius which we shall vainly attempt to find in any of the actors of the present day” (2:298). James Northcote, one of Betty’s portraitists and most stalwart supporters, told William Hazlitt, apparently “with much truth,” that Betty’s “beautiful effusion of natural sensibility, which, with the graceful play of limb in youth, gave such an advantage over every one about him” (qtd. in Fitzgerald 436). The reviewer from *The Ipswich Journal* was particularly taken by young Betty, saying, “He trends the stage, with the dignity and firmness of a veteran. Every limb, every gesture, conspire to give effect to the emotions of his soul; and he seems not a mere human being acting under the influence of ordinary reason, but governed by a wonderful instinct, and by the magical inspiration of genius.”⁵¹

Actors and actresses such as Charles Macklin, Dorothy Jordan, and Edmund Kean who also acted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were praised for what critics called their “natural” acting abilities. The emphasis on Betty’s genius not only helped to establish Betty as a legitimate talent, but also lent that same air of legitimacy to his admirers and their adoration of the young boy. The naturalness of a child actor’s performance is key to their success or failure.⁵² According to Hazel Waters, Betty represents the beginning of this tradition among child actors where “As far as one can judge, what attracted audiences to child performers was the apparent spontaneity of their performances; from Betty onwards, the search was for untaught, natural genius” (86). Echoing Waters, O’Connor notes, “one element however, attracted audiences like no other—’naturalness’—an attribute which characterized the romantic image of the child

⁵¹*The Ipswich Journal*, December 8, 1804

⁵² Zelizer offers another explanation for the emphasis on a child actor’s naturalness: “Prodigies such as Betty were therefore celebrated for their abilities to slip seamlessly into a variety of roles and to demonstrate a broad range of artistic abilities” (64).

which was gaining currency at this time through the work of poets and artists such as Wordsworth and Blake” (42). For child actors like Betty, the idea of being seen as “natural” was an important step to being legitimized as professional.

Because natural acting was often juxtaposed with trained or tutored acting the word “natural” connoted a sense of dissidence or illegitimacy. The idea of “naturalness” instantly separated these actors and actresses out as others by suggesting that their abilities were in some way unique. Like naturalness, “genius” also demarcates someone whose abilities are greater and therefore different than others. In the case of Betty, his “natural genius” worked to mark him as an illegitimate other, a child with untutored abilities, and as legitimate other, a genius with innate talents. The same can be said of child prodigies who are both adored for their superior talents while simultaneously ostracized because of them. For Betty, the freakishness associated with being a “natural genius” meant that his admirers saw him as both a legitimate talent to be adored and something inherent other and different.

While some theatergoers found Betty’s talents a force of nature, many of Betty’s other admirers found his stage presence *supernatural*. Anne Jackson Mathews, the wife of the comedic actor Charles Mathews, heard “a great man declare his belief that the boy was supernaturally gifted, and expected to see the roof of the theatre open some night and his spirit ascend!” while a theatre manager declared “that the boy ‘had been presented by Heaven,’ and dwelt on the ‘perfect and refined spirit which had been incorporated with his form previous to his birth’”(qtd. in Fitzgerald 435, 427). Anna Seward describes “his fairy frame” and describes how “at thy magic call” the passions from his soul appeared on stage (*Poetical Works*, 383). Indeed, the perception of Betty as a celestial being was

so widespread that the satirical poet, “Peter Pangloss” derisively describes him as “A sole exclusive gift from Heaven!/Immaculate and Heaven-born boy!”⁵³ Betty’s status as an idol was quickly reaching a level that many deemed idolatry.

As an “idol,” Betty’s body became a physical signifier of a deity or divinity that supplanted or superseded “the place of God in human affection” (*OED*). In more colloquial usage, Betty could be seen as a “person so adored” (*OED*). Audiences could only describe the freakishness of Betty’s abilities as something otherworldly, ethereal, and celestial. The emphasis on the young boy’s god-like presence entranced audiences even as it alienated them. Betty’s god-like removal from his followers reinforced not only his position as an idol, but because his admirers felt so alienated by his celestial presence, he became more of an object of their worship than a “person so adored.”

While Betty’s supporters cited his natural abilities and supernatural presence as the principle subjects of their obsessive affections, there was mounting evidence that Betty, or more accurately, Betty’s body, was the real object of their adoration. Percy Fitzgerald, a nineteenth-century theatre historian, speaks of Betty’s “personal attractions—a soft, interesting face, a small, expressive mouth, flowing auburn hair, and a general air of intelligence” (438). John Merritt wistfully recounts “the movements of his body or limbs, are such specimens of elegance and beauty, as leave nothing to be wished for, by the most refined imagination. And this unrivalled grace and propriety, appear in every change of situation, and in every vicissitude of passion” (64-5). Betty’s prettiness was described by the famed portraitist, James Northcote, who in addition to painting the

⁵³ From *The Young Rosciad, an admonitory Poem, well seasoned with Attich Salt, cum notis variorum* as it appears in *The Monthly Review or Literary Journal*, vol. 48, London, 1805, pg. 321.

young boy, was also one of the his most fervent admirers. Northcote described his gracefulness as “exquisite” and declared that the young boy “made all the other actors look so ugly that I could hardly bear to look at them” (Fletcher 87). Many more accounts about Betty focus not on his acting, but rather on the prettiness of the boy’s body, and admirers often produced body catalogues or lists that detail the boy’s various parts. In them, they championed the boy’s “prepossessing” countenance, “quick” eyes, and “pleasing” mouth.⁵⁴ Playfair notes quite simply, “the ‘madness’ to see him was due to the very fact that he wasn’t a man, but an overwhelmingly attractive boy. And when one begins to note the emphasis that contemporary comment placed on his physical attributes, this possibility becomes a virtual certainty. Bettymania must have been basically, however disguisedly, a sexual phenomenon” (76). A sexual phenomenon rooted in the boy’s youthful body.

Betty’s body was always the object of the public’s desire, but the subjects were often the writers and the passions Betty’s young body enflamed within them. A writer for the *Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror* wrote how “his beauty, his graceful figure, his self-possession, his forcible delineation of the character were electrical in their effect” apparently to the point where “the ladies almost forgot their toilet” (228, 230). While admirers claimed that Betty’s “electrical effect” was the result of his natural genius, many others believed that audiences were interested in more than just his acting. The attention from Betty’s male admirers was devotional in nature and often verged on the erotic. Some of Betty’s admirers were moved to write expository verses about the young boy’s body and their emotional and physical responses to it. J. Fisher wrote how

⁵⁴*The Ipswich Journal*, 8 December 1804.

“the *lustre of thine eye*, can Fame express,/ Or speak in tones, that pierce the heart’s recess?/ Impassion’d *tones*, that frozen thoughts would fire,/ Or with deep pathos softer themes inspire” (qtd. in Bisset 41). Macready, who found Betty a “wonderful boy, a miracle of beauty, grace, and genius,” noted that he “held the audience wrapt in breathless attention” (12, 54). “Whatever the artistic enjoyment to be derived from watching Master Betty on the stage,” Playfair argues, “it does not alter the fact that his physical appeal must have aroused a sexual response from both men and women, and particularly from men” (81). Indeed, men’s attention to Betty’s body was so overwhelming that many accused Betty’s supporters of less than pure intentions.

While the idea of “child love” or paedophilia as a category of psychiatric abnormality would not occur until the early twentieth century, there was a sense of impropriety regarding the sexual treatment of children by adults.⁵⁵ Most of these cases, unsurprisingly, involve male perpetrators and female victims and the sheer volume of court cases testify to the abhorrent male abuse of power perpetrated on very young females. The direness of these statistics is only made worse by the fact that the number of reported cases surely pales in comparison to the number of unreported ones. Betty himself was embroiled in several scandals where adult men were accused of sexual abuse and even though laws forbidding paedophilia were more than a century away, the young boy’s admirers were certainly conscious of being viewed as sexual deviants. Writing

⁵⁵ The age of consent throughout England and later Wales was set in the late thirteenth century at the age of twelve. Later, in the sixteenth century, it was lower to the age of ten. It is also important to note that consent laws at this time only applied to females. There were no equivalent laws about consent for males, meaning that instances of male incest, rape, or molestation could have easily gone unreported.

about the “discovery” of child sexual abuse in the nineteenth century, Louise A. Jackson provides some possible reasons driving male victim invisibility in the nineteenth century:

the reason for the invisibility of boys (despite police knowledge of a market for adolescent boy prostitutes) lies in the emergence of the issue from the social purity and rescue societies’ preoccupation with ‘fallen’ women and young female prostitutes. A woman’s character, unlike a man’s, was judged in relation to her sexual reputation. Girls and women could ‘fall’ but boys could not, according to the Victorian sexual schema. Sexually abused girls, as a group, constituted a specially targeted social problem. Boys did not and their futures were rarely discussed. (5)⁵⁶

As Jackson notes, in the case of male victims, the gap between reported and unreported cases, we can only imagine, is further exaggerated by the sexual discourses that promoted and championed male promiscuity, or in the cases of a male perpetrator, the stigma (not to mention illegality) of being viewed as a homosexual. As a young boy with a large male following, Betty was already a “sexual suspect” to use Kristina Straub’s phrase.⁵⁷

In *The Young Rosciad, an admonitory Poem, well seasoned with Attich Salt, cum notis variorum*, “Peter Pangloss” offers this scathing critique of Bettymania: “The boy has certainly some points,/Expressive face and pliant joints,/But shou’d some years be kept at school,/Nor make the public such as a tool./All sober critics, sure, must deem/It folly in

⁵⁶Jackson examines later nineteenth-century cases on her book about child sexual abuse cases. While Jackson’s study takes place after Betty’s career, her inferences about male victim invisibility are still relevant in the early nineteenth century. Jackson’s study is also one of the very few works to formally examine the cases of child sexual abuse in pre-twentieth century Britain, and as such, offers a necessary starting point for future studies on this issue.

⁵⁷ See Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, especially introduction.

the great extreme,/To vie with men, and to possess/More impudence than they profess;/No folly his—and hence it follows,/John Bull's the fool who tamely swallows” (qtd. in *The Monthly Review*, 321). In denouncing the public's obsession with this small boy, Pangloss relates the entire Betty phenomena to a homosexual act as Betty is “swallowed” by John Bull.

Rumors of sexual abuse continually haunted Betty's relationship with the public, and several adult men were accused and tried in the court of public opinion. The most salacious of these rumors involved Betty's own acting tutor, a man who was surprisingly dismissed from Betty's inner circle without explanation. Playfair admits that the evidence for suspecting Betty's tutor of what we would know refer to as pedophilia is “very flimsy” since much of the speculation relies on the scurrilous accusation in *The Young Roscaid*, Master Betty's own dislike of the tutor, and the very public falling out between the tutor and the pupil.

Despite the very circumstantial evidence surrounding the tutor's possibly inappropriate relationship with Betty, Playfair plainly states: “The point is that for any man who was sexually attracted to small boys, the opportunity of being Master Betty's tutor might in itself have been irresistible. For Master Betty was a boy of extraordinary physical beauty; and his physical beauty, one may venture to say here and now, proved, from the point of view of his Friends, to be his chief asset” (23). Betty's body was certainly his “chief asset” and his so-called “Friends” encouraged the potentially inappropriate desire and voyeurism of other adult whose motives for befriending the young boy were less than pure. The sexual energy displaced onto Betty's body renders

the young boy not just a pleasing, but a passive participant to the spectators' erotic gaze and much like a doll, provides pleasure without receiving it.

2.2 An Image of a God: The Betty-Doll and the Consequences of I-doll Play

Betty's doll-like quality was certainly exaggerated by his young age, childish appearance, and short stature, and on stage, the young boy would have looked quite toy-like when acting alongside his adult counterparts. Anna Seward, for instance, recalls how his "features are cast in a diminutive mould, particularly his nose and mouth" (qtd. in Doran, "About Master Betty," 50). _Betty's diminutive quality led some critics to deride him as "the public's toy" (qtd. in *The Monthly Review*, 321) while others used his toy-like quality to question the legitimacy of his popularity: "Pray, what is master Betty like,/Who thus the public mind does strike?/He's like another tiny thing—/A watch upon a finger ring:/And though, indeed, full well we know,/That larger watches better go,/Yet as the toy's so light and small,/We wonder that it goes at all" (qtd. in *The Kaleidoscope*, 11 June 1822, 392). The boy's toy-like quality became the emphasis of the public images that circulated around the young actor and contributed to his reception as a pretty plaything.

Satirists pointedly depicted Betty as so comically diminutive that he looks more akin to a puppet or doll than thirteen-year-old actor. For instance, J. B. Arnaud's *The Introduction!*, the diminutive Betty is introduced by Richard Brinsley Sheridan to King George III, Queen Charlotte, and their royal entourage. (Figure 2.2) Standing on the extreme right, Sheridan presents a miniature figure we are to suppose is Betty as "The Wonder of the Theatrical World—a Diamond amongst pebbles—A Snow drop in a mud pool. The Golden Fleece of the Morning Chronicle—The Idol of the Sun! —The Mirror of the Times! —The Glory of the Morning Post. —The pride of the Herald—and the

finest cordial of the Publicans Advertiser!" This grandiose introduction is larger than its subject who appears at Sheridan's foot. The figure of Betty is hardly discernable and his features are almost entirely obscured by his smallness. The miniature Betty barely reaches the top of the King's stocking and is closer in size to the Queen's tiny shoe. Indeed, Betty appears so small before the King and Queen that they need the assistance of monocles as well as Sheridan's over-sized candlesticks to see him. The miniature boy presents himself for their amusement, promising to "ne'er shame thy favour." Using



Figure 2.2 *The Introduction!* by J. B. Arnaud. Victoria and Albert Museum

Betty's promise of amusement and his miniature stature, Arnaud reinforces the idea of Betty as a plaything in the popular imagination.

Betty's toy-like body is also on display in Thomas Rowlandson's *Theatrical Leap Frog*, which shows a miniature Betty flying over the back of grumbling John Philip Kemble. (Figure 2.3) The boy, who is only slightly larger than the esteemed actor's head, shrinks in comparison with this literal and figurative giant of the British stage who



Figure 2.3 *Theatrical Leap Frog* by Thomas Rowlandson. Victoria and Albert Museum.

laments Betty's fame, "Alas! is it come to this! Ah! woe is me Seeing what I have seen Seeing what I see!! Oh Roscious—" The "theatrical leap frog" establishes just such a comparison between Kemble's reputation and talent and Betty's fashion and novelty, and Betty's size in comparison to Kemble demonstrates the physical manifestation of such comparisons. Kemble also provides an interesting example of how both caricaturists and portraitists depicted Betty as particularly androgynous and doll-like. Betty's skin appears fair whereas Kemble's skin is dark and there is a hint of stubble. Betty's features are smooth and his cheeks are rosy, giving the boy a cherub-like appearance. Kemble's angular nose, dark, bushy eyebrows, and exaggerated chin give the actor a rougher, more mature look. Both men have curly hair, but Betty's tight, blonde ringlets are long enough to frame his face and still wildly swing through the air. Kemble's dark curls are tame in comparison, appearing styled and away from his face. When coupled with the extreme difference in their stature, these features provide a stark contrast between Kemble the rugged-feature giant of the theatre and Betty the cherub-faced doll.

The objectification of Betty's body and his transformation from gendered subject to neutered object was further reinforced by the ambiguity of his young body and the reproduction of that body in other popular images. Betty's body gave him an air of effeminacy that left many in the audience confused and critical of the young boy. Some critics, feeling that Betty, his father, and the theatre managers were tricking them, even called for a medical inspection of his genitals in order to determine his anatomical gender (Kahan 27). Betty and his supporters were compelled to publish a copy of his baptismal certificate "in order to squelch a rumour that the boy was not really a boy at all, but as the

Rev. W. P. Russell, a later detractor, was to put it, ‘of the feminine gender’” (Playfair 39-40).

The public’s insatiable desire for images of Betty transformed the actor into an image and reinforced not only the young boy’s popularity but also his thing-like quality. An engraving by William Satchwell Leney provides an interesting example of artists depicting Betty’s seemingly indefinite gender. In the engraving, Betty is depicted demurely staring away from the spectator, which allows the artist to highlight the length and curl of his hair, the fairness of his skin against the white collar, and the contrast of his fair skin with his rosy cheeks. (Figure 2.4) Indeed, Anna Seward calls him “an effeminate boy of thirteen” (qtd. in Doran, “About Master Betty,” 50). The inscription on the print, “Master Betty,” only served to reinforce the perception of the boy as innately feminine. Betty’s name contributed to the perceived gender ambiguity.⁵⁸ At the time the young boy was on stage, Betty was not only a common abbreviation for Elizabeth and for women in general, but it was also associated with effeminate men and men who were associated with women’s work. Betty’s name and image blurred the lines masculine or feminine, and his ambiguous body often rendered him an “it.”

⁵⁸In Richard Marsh’s *Confessions of a Young Lady: Her Doings and Misdoings*, the “young lady” in question speaks to an older gentleman about her desire to go on stage, saying: “Well, I don’t think I could act old women. But I might try. Young Betty acted an old man.” “Young Betty did. Is that so? And who might young Betty be? A friend of yours? That young lady over there, her name’s Betty.” [...] “He was a boy.” “A boy? With a name like Betty? What was his father and mother up to then?” (18). While Marsh’s tête-à-tête between the young lady and old gentlemen is supposed to be a humorous depiction of generational difference, the dialogue speaks to the deep and lasting controversy over Betty’s gender identity. Like Marsh’s gentleman, many of Betty’s contemporaries questioned whether the boy “with a name like Betty” was really who (and what) he claimed to be.

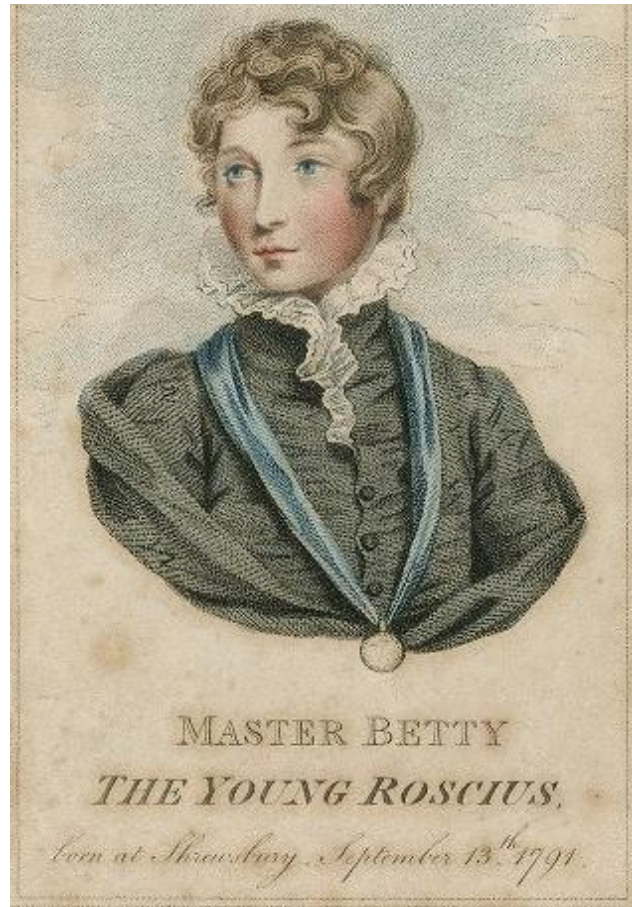


Figure 2.4 *Master Betty The Young Roscius* by William Satchwell Leney.

Folger Shakespeare Library.

Many of the gender ambiguous images of Betty depict the young actor as Young Norval from John Home's *Douglas*, one of Betty's most popular characters. Abandoned by his aristocratic mother, Young Norval escapes certain death when a shepherd, Old Norval, saves him. He remains with the shepherds until his aristocratic identity is eventually exposed. Young Norval is given a commission in the army and becomes a military hero, but his triumph is short-lived, as the hero becomes the victim of an inheritance plot. While the Young Norval character appears ripe with allusions to a hyper-masculine aesthetic, a rugged, war-hero with a troubled and tragic past,

overwhelmingly artists chose to depict Betty as the shepherd of the character's youth and deemphasized the militaristic aspects of the character.

John Opie's portrait, *William Henry West Betty* (1804) certainly takes this approach by emphasizing many of the young actor's more feminine presence.⁵⁹ (Figure 2.5) Opie's portrait certainly pays tribute to the character's military prowess by including Spartan costume replete with armor and spear, but it is Young Norval's shepherding past that the portraitist emphasizes. The setting of the piece could recall a sparse battlefield or a soldier returning from war, but it most closely resembles Young Norval's description of his father's lands: "My name is Norval: on the Grampian hills/My father feeds his flocks; a frugal swain,/Whose constant cares were to increase his store,/And keep his only son, myself, at home" (II.i.16). In addition to the setting, Opie portrays Betty's long, flowing locks and his rosy cherub face in direct contrast to the character's hyper-masculine military persona. Betty's left hand gestures gently in the air as if calling his herd, or the

⁵⁹ Admirers and critics alike found Betty's onstage performance as particularly feminine and many compared his stage presence with the day's leading actress: Sarah Siddons. While Siddons herself found Betty and fanfare around him detestable, the young actor credited Siddons with inspiring him to take to the stage (Fitzgerald 425). Betty's imitation of Siddons' cadence was so noticeable that one critic complained, "his voice, like his person, is but in blossom, though his attempt to assimilate his tones to the *Siddonian*, strikes the ear as hollow and artificially absurd" (qtd. in Bisset 17). Alluding to Siddons and Betty's imitation of her, James Boaden derides young male actors, describe how they "endeavour to move you by a *monotonous heavy cadence*, such as even great actresses *moan* out, when they do not choose to *think* while they speak;—no rare occurrence: but they get tired of repetition, are frequently unwell, and the *substitute* passes, where the ears are sufficiently long" (2: 174). Betty's emulation of the Siddonian cadence was not the only way he mimicked the great actress. Kahan describes Betty as "riveted" by Siddons and details how when he saw her performances he was "not only attracted to a female role, he identified with the effeminate actions and emotions of Siddons's part and portrayal" (107).



Figure 2.5 *William Henry West Betty* by John Opie. National Portrait Gallery

spectator, towards him in a movement that undercuts any threat of violence from the spear in his right hand. Indeed, Opie stations the spear at the boy's side, giving it more of an appearance of a shepherd's staff than a military weapon. Opie replaces the hyper-masculine Spartan soldier with figure of the shepherd, depicts this shepherd boy as particularly effeminate in both his physical body and his gestures, and uses light to direct the viewer's gaze towards these feminine features. The artist mirrors Betty's non-threatening presence in the boy's stance. His body faces forward while his left leg faces forward as if he is walking closer to the viewer. Like the lighting on the boy's face, Opie invites the viewer's gaze towards the young actor's long, muscular, lean legs. The lingering light on Betty's lean legs, graceful arms and hands, and fair features purposefully draws the viewer's attention to their feminine quality and emphasizes the young boy's "prettiness."

In a similar print of Betty as Young Norval, the anonymous artist also highlights the drama of Betty's hair by having the boy positioned almost in profile. (Figure 2.6) The boy's helmet has been completely cast aside so as to magnify the effect of the messy, curly hair. While this print does present the young boy as a soldier, the insignia of his service, including his helmet and shield, are off to the side. The most masculine and phallic symbol in the piece, the sword is barely visible on his hip while the end sticks out behind his tunic in an awkward angle. The downward position of the sword coupled with its diminutive length gives it a flaccid appearance, and adds to the overall effeminacy of the boy's body, his hand gesture, and wild curls.⁶⁰ The emphasis that such images placed

⁶⁰ The manner in which Betty's curls were described and depicted is not unlike the ways critics and artists discussed Dorothy Jordan's famous locks. For more on Jordan's curls, see Perry's "Hairy Signs."



Figure 2.6 Close-up of *Master Betty as Norval in Home's Douglas*.

Folger Shakespeare Library.

on Betty's hair and feminine appearance were certainly in line with the popular reception of the actor: an "old actress" described Betty's features as "delicate" and "somewhat feminine" and detailed how "in the daytime those abundant tresses were confined with a comb, which still more gave the idea of a female in male costume" (qtd. in Fitzgerald 429, 430). As the description by the "old actress" emphasizes, Betty and his "abundant

tresses” left audiences with a lasting impression of his feminine beauty and effeminate air.

Some prints of the young actor seemed to be merely excuses to highlight the young boy’s tresses. The artist of “Master Betty Surnamed Young Roscius,” for instance, depicts young boy in the character of Young Norval while highlighting the young idol’s hair. (Figure 2.7) While the young actor does carry a sword, the signifier of his military experience is hung at his side and largely obscured by his dramatic hand gestures and



Figure 2.7 *Master Betty surnamed Young Roscius in the Character of Norval* published by Tomkins. Folger Shakespeare Library.

decadent costume. Instead of the sword, the artist displays the boy's long, flowing locks, draping them down his neck and over his shoulders.

The angle of the boy's head allows these curls to be the feature of the print and the focus of the spectator's attention. The artist's attention to Betty's hair is perhaps unsurprising given the public's infatuation with the young boy's locks. Here, we can see why the critic from the *Dramatic Mirror* described his hair as "not only luxuriant, but of a most beautiful hue, somewhat between a flaxen colour and brown" (658). What is surprising is this critic's revelation that the young boy was "not unconscious" of the prettiness of his hair nor the effect it had on spectators and took "great care to display his ringlets on critical occasions with effect" (658). Whether or not Betty consciously used his hair to flirt with his spectators is certainly a matter of opinion. What matters, however, is the *perception* that Betty was indeed using his hair to flirt with his spectators and that the spectators believed him to be flirting with them.

Betty's physical attributes alongside these images that emphasized his ambiguous body created, as Kahan has suggested, a perception that Betty was "a pretty doll" (27).⁶¹ Being described and treated like a "pretty doll" not only contributed to his reputation as an object, but also fueled the desire to own and consume the young boy's body. At the

⁶¹There is an interesting cross-pollination between stage makeup, dolls, and portraiture at this time: "Red dots in the corners of the eyes were commonly employed in actor's stage makeup. In the age of oil and gas lighting this gave extra life to the eye. If the head turned and the eye was partly thrown into shadow, the red highlight could also serve as a means of ensuring that the audience's focus remained on it. Imitation of stage makeup probably explains how this idea found its way to the marionette stage. It is a technique employed in eighteenth-century portrait painting, however, and is also found in some eighteenth-century dolls" (McCormick 92).

time Betty was acting, the most popular dolls were fashion dolls.⁶² Dressmakers would display these fashion dolls in their shops as miniature models of the latest styles and trends in fashion. Unlike the modern “baby doll,” fashion dolls were replicas of their adult counterparts presumably to allow the female shopper an opportunity to project herself unto the doll and visualize the doll’s fabulous garments on her own body.⁶³ The result, as many scholars have suggested, is an individual and social relationship between fashion, dolls, and women. Examining the history of the fashion doll, Juliette Peers describes the depth of this association: “The doll not only frequently looks like a woman, sometimes she *is* a woman; in fact she is a clear, unmistakable sign of women’s limited intellect, passivity, and frivolity” (9). Sharon Marcus, describing the position of dolls in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, echoes Peers assessment of the doll’s function: “For many Victorian feminists, the doll was a metaphor for women’s status as inferior playthings” (155). The cognitive association between women and dolls resulted in a slippage between female subject and material object, female-as-consumer and female-as-

⁶²Fashion dolls are commonly associated with France and French doll-makers, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, as Peers notes: “Not only France circulated fashion dolls. Tsarina Elizabeth ordered dolls in 1751 from London to obtain up-to-date fashion information. Catherine the Great sent dolls from Saint Petersburg to Stockholm to show King Gustav III the original and novel items she herself had designed for her grandchildren. Von Boehn tracked a colonial trade in which dolls were sent from England to America throughout the eighteenth century. English dolls were still providing guidance to American women in 1796, twenty years after the Declaration of Independence” (Peers 18)

⁶³Baby dolls or dolls that resemble infants only gained popularity in the twentieth century. From the seventeenth through the early nineteenth century, English dolls replicated their female, adult counterparts were commonly made of wood, with wax dolls introduced much later in the eighteenth century: “The wooden dolls of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often had wigs nailed to their heads, and the later wax dolls had hair painstakingly inserted into their scalps, half a dozen at a time, with hot needles” (Robertson 176).

consumed, which reinforced the position of women as consumable objects and playthings.

For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women, dolls certainly provided a model for the latest trends and styles, but they also suggested to women a way of looking, behaving, and consuming that was sympathetic with contemporary expectations of women as passive and pretty, frivolous and inferior. Yet while critics have explored the relationship between women, girls, and dolls, the relationship between Betty and the public suggests that the relationship between boys and dolls could use further examination. In Betty's case, the young man takes the usual position of consumable object and the boy-turned-doll becomes the plaything for adult men and women. Transformed from "a person so adored" to an object that is obsessively worshipped and i-doll-ized.

Accustomed to looking at and playing with dolls, Betty's female followers are often described as handling the young actor in this same manner. The comedian, Joseph Shepherd Munden, described how the British public treated Betty "With the waywardness of a petted child, who, when it has a new doll, breaks the head of its former favourite" (118). The Betty-doll was as desirable and perhaps more desirable than the person it signified, and many members of fashionable society longed to touch the object of their pseudo-religious worship. Edward Stirling, in his history of Drury Lane, describes the typical reaction to a Betty performance: "Dozens of carriages were in waiting nightly, after Betty's performance, to carry him off: fierce was the struggle between the *élite* of female society which should have this new toy to lionise in their *salons*" (172). As Stirling's description suggests, female society not just wanted to *have*

this new toy, but *should* have it. Dolls, after all, were in the feminine domain and the intense desire and fierce struggle to own this “new toy” was not only a signifier of a woman’s ability to obtain such a precious commodity, but also a rebuke to male society who had delegitimized doll play as mere frivolity. Now that “grave lawyers, statesmen, poets, critics, were each and all delighted with the graceful boy’s precocious talents” (Stirling 173) female society was now able to stake a claim on Betty and the doll’s play he represented.

The fierce struggle and eventual attainment of Betty, the “new toy,” resulted in a kind of sexual gratification for the female consumer. Critics discuss how Betty’s female admirers interactions with Betty verge on the erotic. For instance, John Doran records how “duchesses and countesses caressed the boy” (2:297) while Fitzgerald describes how the young actor was “fondled by duchesses” and “naturally made a pet of” (442, 431). Seward, likewise, describes how his performance “enchanted us all, at once by his inspired simplicity of manners in private company, for he was much caressed and invited” (*Letters*, 363). Macready described the young Betty was “caressed, fondled, and idolized by peeresses, and actually besieged for a mere glimpse of him by crowds at his hotel door” (12). Examining the significance of female doll play, Sharon Marcus argues, the sexual act of “caressing” and “fondling” also recall a child’s interaction with a doll. Using almost uses these words exactly, she describes how “a proper girl had to worship at the altar of femininity by idolizing, caressing, or tormenting her female doll” (133). Betty himself probably contributed to this perception: “Very likely, he went through all his social engagements in a sort of self-induced hypnotic trance; indeed it is hard to imagine how he could otherwise have endured them” (Playfair 108). Taking the place of

the female doll, Betty's body becomes the object of the women's affections and desires, becoming in many ways not only an extension of themselves, but also the sexual desires they project onto their female dolls.

Women were not alone in treating Betty like a personal plaything. While the accusations of the tutor are the most troubling, other male admirers engaged in adoration of the boy's body that even their contemporaries found distasteful. Northcote, for instance, records in his diary how Betty's "dressing room was crowded as full as it could contain of all the court of England and happy were those could get in at the time his father was rubbing his naked body from the perspiration after the exertion in performing his part on the stage" (qtd. in Playfair 86). Like a fashion doll, Betty was costumed, stripped nude, and costumed again all while in the public eye. Of course, unlike a fashion doll, Betty was a young boy at the tender age of thirteen when he, or more accurately his "Friends," began letting people into his dressing room. Of course, Northcote's own account is certainly questionable for the sheer excitement he shows at watching a young boy being rubbed down naked in front of a group of other, probably male, adults.

Even though Northcote found this scene titillating though perfectly acceptable, others did not share his view. Mrs. Charles Matthews, who witnessed the same scene as Northcote describes, "It was offensively amusing (if such a term be allowed) to listen to the enthusiastic ecstasies of the novel visitors who came nightly to the green room to gaze upon the Boy-wonder, and haply to kiss the garment-hem of the Betty, who, had his person been as feminine as his name, could not have had more fervent male adorers, some of whom were almost impious in their enthusiasm" (qtd. in Playfair 86). Betty's

“fervent male adorers” were certainly “impious” according to rote religious standards, but also, it seems, according to the standards of celebrity worship and cast an “offensive” veil over the entire Betty phenomenon.

Betty’s admirers, by treating the young boy like a doll, could act out their sexual desires for the boy’s young body without the taint of indecency. In the case of Betty, the process of i-dolli-zation is literal: his body is rendered into a doll and an object for worship and adornment. Betty, like fashion dolls, was passive and pretty, frivolous and inferior, and was able to provide and accept pleasure without resistance. Admirers could fondle, caresses, and idolize the young boy without fear of repercussion or social stigma. Betty, in other words, was a thing to be enjoyed and his transformation from acting subject to passive object, from a gendered “I” to an unsexed “it” certainly reinforced this perception.

2.3 Obsessively Worshipping a Thing: The “It” Effect

Further contributing to Betty’s position as an ‘it’ was the late nineteenth-century consumer culture and the increasing commodification of celebrities and their images. The eighteenth and nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of objects meant to simulate the human subject including waxworks, automata, puppets, and dolls. Pleasure-seekers could visit fairs and museums to find the latest innovations in waxworks and automata while those interested in “seeing” dolls need only to browse in the nearest periodical for the best place to look. The practice of looking at dolls was such a fashionable pastime that “Numerous advertisements indicate that the practice of ‘seeing’ dolls was popular especially between the 1750s and 1790s” (Park 90).

Certainly, such objects existed well before the Enlightenment, but despite innovations in each category, none of these human replicas could be considered a new technology or craft. Instead, the increased interest with such objects suggests a fascination with new ideas of subjectivity and the desire to see the self reflected back in the thing. Julie Park, for instance, views the popularity of human-like objects as “as demonstrating the period’s fascination with “man-made” versions of the human, as well as objects made to look like the human. While the act of constructing a self-moving doll indicated a wondrous advancement in science and technology, and while dolls in general played important roles in developing a new market for fashion and leisure, automata and dolls also represented the growing complexity of modern subjectivity” (16). The uncanny nature of human replication suggests an inherent monstrosity not only in such replicas, but also in the human subject itself. Human replicas like waxworks, automata, puppets, and dolls simultaneously performed humanness and thingness, consumer and consumed, monstrosity and beauty.⁶⁴

Betty’s audiences constantly described his thingness by focusing on what they viewed as his innate inhumanness. One critic accused the “Managers of the London Theatres” for playing to the “desire of novelty which influences the public, and ready as

⁶⁴An interesting example of this juxtaposition is the (in)famous Bartholomew Fair where dolls, colloquially referred to as the “Bartholomew babies,” were often positioned alongside a veritable menagerie of other human-like objects including puppets, waxworks, and automata, competed what the fair’s historian, Henry Morley, refers to as the fair’s “monsters.” Park has suggested that while dolls were “not as spectacularly aberrant as its exotic beasts, scaly boys, hermaphrodites, and living fairies, the doll in all its sizes and forms—from puppets, waxworks, and automata to ‘babies’ for fairgoers to buy and take home—occupied a privileged position in the Bartholomew Fair’s illustrious family of oddities. Dolls played an integral role in the Fair’s entertainment because they made literal what the monsters underwent: the transformation of their beings into playthings for mass consumption” (90).

they are to gratify their desires, can really think of degrading their theatres into *puppet-shows*—for a *Hamlet, Richard, Romeo, &c. &c.* performed by such a child, must be considered merely in the light of an ingenious *automaton*” (qtd. in Bisset 50). Here, Betty is transformed into a thing that only pretends to human, and the implication is that despite his ingenuity or uniqueness, he remains an automaton.

The satirical print entitled *John Bull in Lilliput or Theatricals for the Nineteenth Century* also portrays Betty as little more than human replica. The image is a satire on the Betty phenomenon and the many imitators his successful created including the Glasgow Roscius, the Little Siddons, the Infant Billington, Dublin New Roscius, the Little Orpheus, and of course, Betty “The Real Young Roscius.” (Figure 2.8) The print features a full-figured John Bull as something of a puppet-master as he sits playing the double bass before a toy stage singing “Boys and girls come out to play/The Moon does shine as bright as Day,/Come with a hoop, come with a call/Come with good will or not at all.” On the stage, several miniatures representing child actors appear and perform their various roles as they announce themselves to John Bull under the scroll “Men are but Children of a larger Growth.” Making a grand, dramatic gesture with his arms, Betty, the second from the left, appears in oriental dress and proclaims himself the “Real Young Roscius.” The “real” child phenomenon is so small that his features are completely obscured by his size, and indeed, the only way the viewer can recognize the famous child actor is through his self-proclamation. As was often the case, Betty’s detractors reduced him to a mere replica of a human subject by describing and portraying the young boy as a *thing* acting like a *person*.

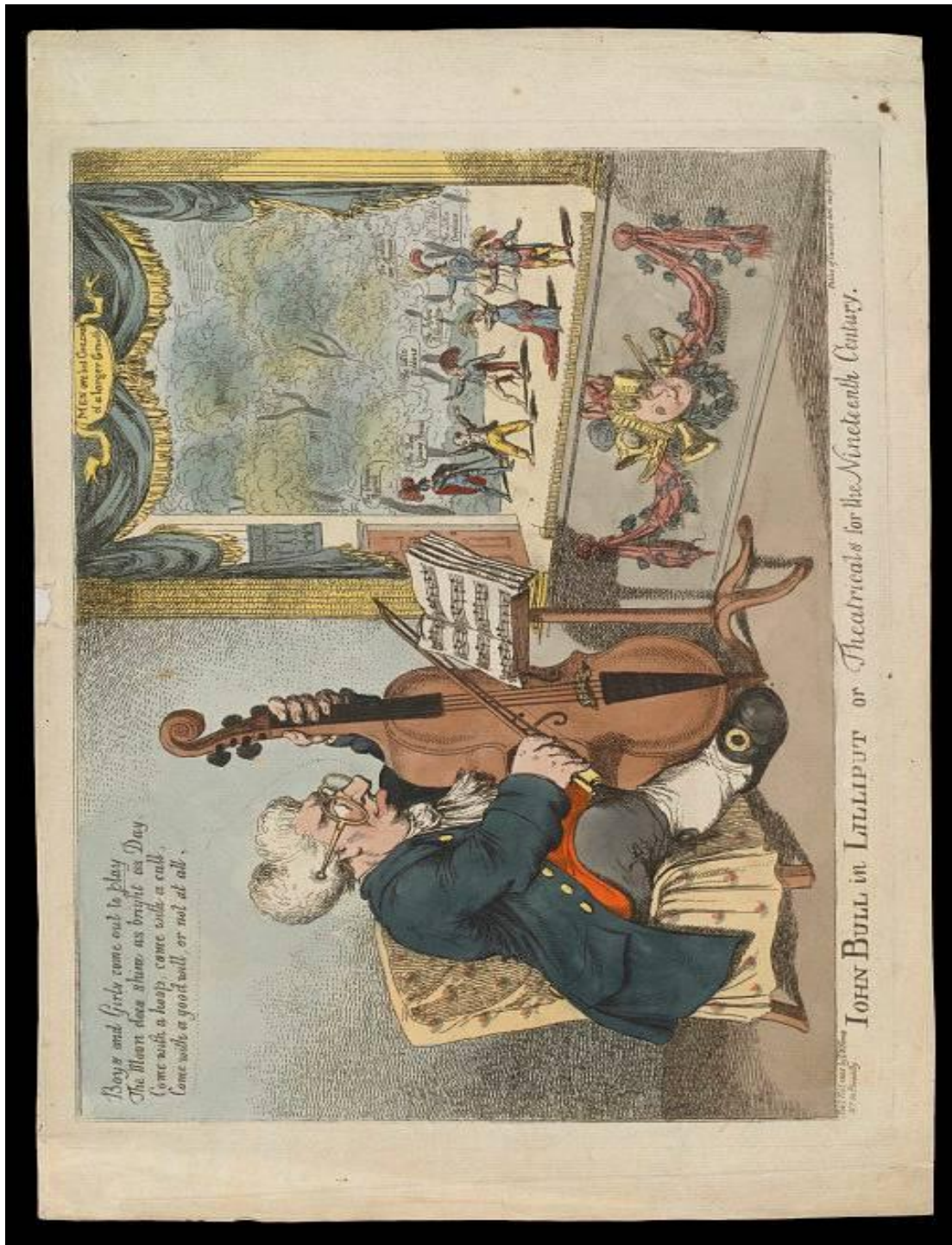


Figure 2.8 *John Bull in Lilliput or Theatricals for the Nineteenth Century* published by S.

W. Fores. Victoria and Albert Museum.

The emphasis on Betty's "realness" is certainly a comment on the many imitators that fill the stage to either side of him, but we can also read this proclamation as denial of his un-"realness" or the perception of puppet-like acting and doll-like features. A thing's "realness" or its ability to project realness is central to its believability. This is certainly true for dolls for as Richard Kendall points out, "At their center is the question of likeness, of the doll as a carefully miniaturized facsimile of a living child or baby, and of related forms—such as puppets, mannequins, and wax models—as substitutes for the human figure. Then as now, a superior doll or puppet would be admired for its 'lifelike' qualities and spoke of—and often spoken to—as if it were 'real'" (61). Betty's "realness" was a significant aspect not only to the "Master Betty" franchise, but also to the young boy's public image, and Betty's legitimacy hung on the public's willingness to believe that he was able to successfully replicate the skills, emotions, and deliveries of his adult counterparts.

The tension created between the "real" Betty and the "unreal" Betty was only reinforced by the consumer society that duplicated and reduplicated the boy's image. Betty's constant duplication, his monstrous doubling, meant that the young actor also suffered from the taint of illegitimacy and unnaturalness attached to thingness. Artisans reproduced Betty's image on everything from portraits to prints and from miniatures to medals and the consumable nature of these ideas served to intensify the intimacy between the young boy and the public. Thomas Campbell, in his biography of Sarah Siddons, angrily recalls how Betty's "bust was stuck up in marble by the best sculptors; he was painted by Opie and Northcote; and the verses that were poured out upon him were in a style of idolatrous adulation" (328). While Campbell is certainly dismissive of the "that

baby-faced boy” who Siddons “never condescended to act with,” his description of the public infatuation that attended the Betty was not far from the truth. Betty’s body was constantly on display for public consumption whether that is on stage, in sculpture, in portraits, or in verse. Because celebrity consumer culture was blossoming around Betty, the young boy’s admirers could also purchase and own a representation of their beloved idol.

Purchasable items allowed audiences to own, however abstractly, a piece of their beloved idol. Not only did such items reinforce his position as worshipped object, but they also made manifest the idea that Betty and his body could be bought and sold for personal consumption. An admirer could *have* Betty in a way that felt individual, personal, and intimate, and because Betty was already discussed and presented in ways that objectified him and emphasized his thingness, the feelings of ownership and intimacy were only intensified further. Artisans produced prints, miniatures, coins, and figurines of the young actor for mass consumption. (Figure 2.9) The portable nature of items such as meant that such items could be easily hidden away for personal and private enjoyment.

Unlike Betty, these items were meant for individual consumption and allowed for a more intimate relationship between the consumer and celebrity. (Figure 2.10) These medals could also be placed (and almost certainly were) close to the body, such as in a pocket or bodice, or near the body, like beneath a pillow or under a mattress and enabled a kind of intimacy with the object that a larger object would not allow. The smallness of these objects would have also mirrored Betty’s small stature as well as the way artists represented him as a very small boy. The reduplicative nature of the boy’s

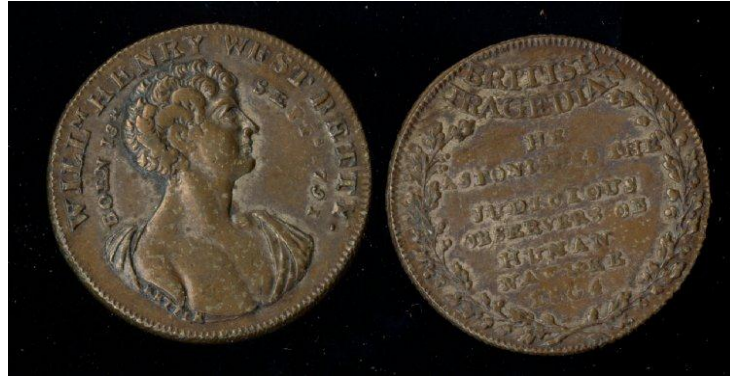


Figure 2.9 “Commemorative Medal.” Inscribed as William Henry West Betty. Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 2.10 “Figurine.” Identified as Henry William West Betty. Victoria and Albert Museum.

small body in these miniature objects would have further connected the boy's body with these miniature objects and reinforced his position as a consumable object and a thing.

Some of Betty's more wealthy admirers, such as Thomas Lister Parker, could afford to commission portraits of Betty for their personal collections. Parker, a man who Betty's biographer describes as "a kind of high-paying hanger-on," commissioned portraits of Betty by both James Northcote and John Opie and "expected gratitude" for his investment in the young actor (Playfair 88). The implication here is that the "expected gratitude" was sexual in nature and that the commissioned portraits could be seen as a presumed *quid pro quo* for sexual favors. Playfair admits these allegations were based on unsubstantiated rumors and circumstantial evidence, but still reminds us, "it is significant that Master Betty's vulgar following appears to have been largely male" (82). While it is unclear as to the nature of this "expected gratitude," what is clear is that the Parker was interested in owning a kind of personalized relic of his idol. Parker was willing to pay handsomely for the privilege of watching master portraitists paint the boy's image.

In many ways, Parker's commissioned portraits of Betty are simply a reminder of the erotic experience of watching a beloved idol dressed, positioned, and rendered in a manner of personal preference while the purchase of the object and possession of the image for his private collection would have been a physical remembrance of the initial titillation. While Parker's commissioned portraits of Betty represent an extreme example of Betty's consumption by the public, it does demonstrate a desire for and fascination with the objectification and consumption of celebrity icons as a source of erotic entertainment and sexual pleasure. The problem with children celebrity icons, however,

is that the object of the public's affection, the youthful body, does not and cannot remain static. As Betty's body began to mature, his former admirers found him little more than a shadow of his former self.

2.4 An Incorporeal Phantom: The Idol's Afterimage

At the age of twenty, Betty returned to the stage in the hope of recapturing his former celebrity. The child phenomenon had been absent from the stage while he spent a brief time studying at Christ's College, Cambridge before returning to the provincial theatre at Bath. Ever the polarizing figure, his return to acting was greeted with as much ridicule as his first appearance was greeted with praise. As a grown man, Betty had lost much of his youthful attraction and audiences found his performing skills lackluster. The boy once praised for his seemingly supernatural talents was viewed as little more than a public annoyance. Betty's performances were "indifferently attended," and "his attraction was found to have passed way" (Stirling 173). For many of Betty's admirers, the former child star's return dredged up remembrances of their former passions and many were embarrassed by the lavish attention they showered on the attractive young boy. For his critics, Betty's awkward reintroduction to the stage gave them an opportunity to remind Betty's followers of their folly and to gloated about their ability to discern talent from trend and genius from novelty.

Many argued that the little success and fanfare that accompanied Betty's return to the stage was the result of embarrassed and curious former admirers. Cowell believed that Betty was "Just tolerated as man by those who were ashamed to confess that they were deceived in thinking him a divinity when a boy" (23). Two of Betty's most fervent admirers, the portraitist James Northcote and the actor Charles Macready, lamented the

public rejection of the former child star. After seeing one of the comeback performances, Northcote bemoans Betty's fate at the hands of the public: "Ah, but it didn't matter how well he did it then; the world will not admire the same thing over again—the world never wonders twice. The public, indeed, seemed to feel ashamed to have to wonder a second time, and they ran off like a dog with its tail between its legs, like a dog which neither threats nor coaxings can bring back again" (Fletcher 87). Macready agrees with Northcote: "it seemed as if the public resented the grown man the extravagance of the idolatry they had blindly lavished on the boy" (44). After seeing the older Betty perform, he does admit there is some validity to these accusations and describes how there is "peculiarity in his level elocution" and a "sing-song and a catch in his voice," but Betty's "originality and fire of genius" convinces him "that if he had not to his prejudice the comparison of his boyish triumphs, and the faulty manner derived from frequent careless repetition, he would have maintained a distinguished position in his maturer years," and ultimately, the old stager concludes that he had simply been "used up" (54). As Macready suggests, the underlying problem with Betty's comeback performances was that his body as well as his attraction had been "used up."

Much like the earlier critiques of Betty's debut, the criticisms of his comeback performances focused on his body and the relationship between his body and the legitimacy of his acting success. As a young boy, admirers praised his "natural" acting and his ability to use his body to captivate his audiences. As an adult, however, Betty could no longer rely on the youthful sex appeal. Critics found no end to the pleasure in mocking the "great, lubberly, overgrown, fat-voiced, good-tempered fellow with very little talent" Betty had become (Cowell 23). Macready tells us, "his figure no longer

retained its symmetrical proportions, having grown bulky and heavy” even though “his face was very handsome” (44). Betty’s admirers had long lamented the inevitable destruction of their cherub-faced doll. Even as Anna Seward expresses “no doubt” that Betty “will be a great an universal actor,” she believes “It is, I think, superfluous to look forward to the mature fruit of this luxuriant blossom” (qtd. in Doran “About Master Betty,” 51). Gone was the “slight,” “graceful,” and “wonderful boy” that had aroused the minds, bodies, and passions of the British isles, replaced by the “mature fruit” of Betty’s grown, portly body. Betty’s ultimate rejection at the hands of the British public illustrates the inevitable problem with the appeal of child actors: they grow up.

As a young idol, Betty’s person and image became a recognizable commodity, a thing to be adored and consumed. Betty’s adult body, however, did not share the same relationship with that former image in the popular imagination and as a result, became little more than an uncanny reminder of the absent idol. The uncanny nature of this body represents the final phase of i-doll-ization wherein the idol transforms from object to reflection. An idol, in this sense, refers to “a visible but unsubstantial appearance, an image caused by reflection as in a mirror, an incorporeal phantom” (*OED*). While the Betty-doll could remain the perfect, ageless, and attractive thing, Betty himself was bound to maturation and transformation. Standing before the crowds that had once rioted in the seats and fought to see the naked star in his dressing room, the adult Betty appeared more like a monstrous reflection of that former child star. Haunted by that former identity, Betty’s body became a constant reminder to that incorporeal idol that they had adored in portraits, sculptures, and figurines. His sexual appeal, bound to his toy-like body, haunted the adult Betty, turning him into little more than phantom of that former

boy, and like many child performers, Betty's failed to transition from child star into adult celebrity.

Betty's i-doll-ization demonstrates how the sexual appeal of child actors is filtered into a more acceptable consumption of child performer as a commodified thing. As a "person so adored," the young boy's admirers faced public scrutiny over what some felt was inappropriate or illegitimate fascination with the young boy and his body. While many attempted to justify the "naturalness" of their attraction, the mania of the Betty phenomenon undermined admirers ability to both explain and consume the object of their attraction: Betty's body. As a commodified thing, however, Betty's admirers could fondle and caress him without the stigma of social surveillance. His complete objectification also reinforced his position as plaything and allowed the continue consumption of his gender ambiguous body.

Ultimately, however, Betty's i-doll-ization resulted in his utter public rejection when the object of their affection, the young boy's body, failed to correspond to their expectations. The illegitimacy of this new body, not unlike the illegitimacy of his child body, repulsed his former admirers by reminding them of their previous and perhaps misplaced affections. Betty, like many child performers, could not live up to their own idolized image in the public imagination, and his once attractive body became little more than a haunting reminder of that infant phenomenon.

Chapter Three: Edmund Kean's Monstrous Celebrity

On a summer night in 1821, British actor Edmund Kean (1789?-1833) ended his first American tour by exhuming remains of George Frederick Cooke (1756-1812) from the New York cemetery where they had been unceremoniously interred in 1812.⁶⁵ The ghoulish scene commenced

by Kean's request, the lid was raised, the yellow glare of lanterns fell upon a fleshless, eyeless skull, a few bones, and a handful of dust; this being all that was left of one whose soul had moved thousands to fear and pity, to hope and despair. Kean, ever susceptible to impressions, gazed with sadness at this most pitiful sight—the sternest rebuke which human vanity can know; speculated as to when his turn should come to perish in like manner; spoke words of charity towards the dead; and by way of recalling his memory in the future, as well as in recollection

⁶⁵Sources differ concerning the date of Cooke's exhumation.

of this hour and scene, removed and carried away with him the bones of the forefinger of the skeleton's right hand. (Molloy 287-288)

This gothic scene, culminating with Kean's final act of removing Cooke's forefinger, occurred at a time in the actor's life where, for all intents and purposes, Kean should have been reveling in his success rather than in the dust and dirt of a forgotten predecessor. Kean, after all, had successfully debuted in the grand theatres of London, gained both a critical and popular reputation, and was greeted by the American theatres with a flurry of interest and praise. But Kean's reputation as an acting genius was frequently shadowed by his offstage activities. Kean's libertinism took center stage, as the leading man was often found in a local pub rather than walking the boards. Audiences in both America and Britain quickly lost their initial adoration for the headlining actor, and drew comparisons between Kean and another actor who, despite his obvious talent, also squandered his genius in the bottle: George Frederick Cooke. Both Kean and Cooke were lauded for the physicality of their acting, plagued by alcoholism, and compelled to take American tours aimed at restoring sullied reputations. Cooke died in America, an outcast from his native Britain, alone and forgotten. Kean hoped not to complete the cycle of success and failure that had plagued Cooke. And, taking his predecessor's forefinger, Kean used the *memento mori* as a reminder of history's constant presence.

Cooke and Kean in a sense bookend what is referred to as the Romantic era, an era that fundamentally changed the way the British individual understood himself/herself. Political revolutions in France and America, social revolutions involving women's rights and abolition, economic revolutions that brought new technologies, goods, and systems of labor all shaped the formation of individual identity and by extension the individual's

relationship to the state. After the 1776 Revolution, America struggled to both acknowledge its shared history with Britain while forging a new identity as an independent nation, which had interesting, if unexpected, consequences for Kean and Cooke's professional relationship. The unstable Anglo-American political identity helped to create a real life drama that played out across two continents, beyond the death of one protagonist and culminating in the other's ghoulerly in a New York graveyard.

Like Dorothy Jordan and William Henry West Betty, Kean and Cooke formed personal and professional identities outside what was considered "acceptable" were labeled, among other things, illegitimate celebrities by their peers. Both actors marketed themselves as "bad boy" celebrities, a title, which gained them widespread publicity and public intrigue, and for a time, they both garnered fame, wealth, and celebrity. However, like Jordan and Betty, these two men also reaped punishment and criticism by their adoring audiences and discovered that intrigue turned to scandal and peculiarity turned to illegitimacy in the shape of one public misstep.

By using performance theory and current scholarship on the Gothic to explore the Kean-Cooke relationship, I will examine the social and historical processes of identity creation occurring in Britain and America in the early nineteenth century through the lens of illegitimacy. This chapter, therefore, will recount relevant examples from Cooke's and Kean's biographies and chronicle their transatlantic journeys in order to explore the ways their relationship to their British and America audiences function as a microcosm for the creation of transatlantic national identity in the nineteenth century. For it is in scrutinizing their parallel trajectories we can begin to understand how Cooke and Kean

emblemize nationalist ideologies occurring in what scholars traditionally refer to as the Romantic era.

3.1 (Un)Covering History: Cooke and the King of the Yankee Doodles.

Cooke and Kean symbolize a type of celebrity that we have come most commonly to refer to as the “bad boy.” For most readers, the figure of the bad boy as a cultural phenomenon took shape in the last half of the twentieth century, beginning, appropriately, with sub-culture anti-heroes like James Dean and Marlin Brando. But the concept of a bad boy celebrity has its roots in the very beginnings of celebrity culture. The eighteenth century was ripe with proper male celebrity figures, such as Thomas Betterton, David Garrick, and John Philip Kemble, who fashioned themselves into gentleman-actor. These men pushed for the professionalization of the theatre and codified the idea of acting as a science. They attempted to make their onstage and offstage personas complimentary and, as a result, they tried to remain out of the gossip columns and the caricature print shops. These men sought invitations to the dinner tables of the aristocratic and influential, happy to be considered entertaining if still unequal. For some actors, like George Frederick Cooke and Edmund Kean, being a source of entertainment for the fashionable London crowd was a less than satisfying idea. They were not interested in the gentleman-actor model that had garnered their theatrical counterparts such popular success and aristocratic favor.

The “bad boy” celebrity has become a host of activities that generally are viewed as taboo. Like most taboos, the bad boy celebrity engages in activities, such as drug and alcohol abuse, womanizing, and fighting, which place their bodies in direct physical danger, and in this way, the bad boy celebrity can be described ephemeral, and self-

destructive. Because of his involvement with taboo activities, the bad boy celebrity challenges the status quo and rejects traditional ideas of masculinity, and he is referred to by his rejection of a communal identity—exile, outcast, stranger—and his lack of social responsibility. Ultimately, the bad boy rejects the homosociality that defines narratives about masculinity. The appeal of these men is rather obvious: they offer audiences an escape, however, fleeting into a world of danger, intrigue, and transgression unknown in their daily lives.

The story of Cook and Kean is really the story about what makes the celebrity bad boy appealing to different audiences during different historical periods. The bad boy may appear to be a one-dimensional public persona, especially since it is rife for stereotyping, but these figures, demarcated by their extreme individuality, provide a momentary glimpse into the ideals and beliefs of their audiences. The fascination with a particular bad boy celebrity suggests not only the transgressive ideals and beliefs of the admiring audience, but also those ideals and beliefs of the greater society from which the celebrity and audience are transgressing. Because of this dualistic position, a bad boy celebrity can offer scholars an insight into larger discussions about class, nationalism, race, and gender. Thus, in order to understand why Kean exhumed Cooke's remains—and by extension why this relationship emblemizes troubled national identities in Britain and America in the early nineteenth century—we must examine the story of Cooke and Kean at greater length.

One of the preeminent actors of the late eighteenth century, Cooke's life was marred by alcoholism yet punctuated by flashes of genius that kept the theatergoing

public both entranced and terrified.⁶⁶ He was born in 1764 to an unknown father and largely absent mother.⁶⁷ Raised by various relatives, Cooke's early life was chaotic and unproductive. At twenty, Cooke debuted in the provincial theatres, and eventually gained a significant reputation and expansive repertoire. Despite his provincial repute, his London debut at the Haymarket Theatre in 1778 was unremarkable, and he returned to London's outskirts for a prolonged stint. There, Cooke took to drink, eventually developing an addiction that he never overcame. Yet, despite his proclivity for the bottle, Cooke's genius would not be denied and, in 1801, he returned to London, this time triumphing at Covent Garden, where he was touted as London's next rising star.⁶⁸ As London's newest attraction, Cooke's rags to riches story, along with his complete disregard for the London theatre establishment, challenged audiences to question their assumptions about ideas of British identity, to ponder the idea: what if?

In London, Cooke hoped to capture the fame that seemed always beyond his grasp while in the provinces. His natural acting quickly wooed audiences who reminded of their former favorite, the now-dead Charles Macklin. Audiences were quick to praise Cooke's ability and to draw comparisons between the two actors. And the similarities were not incidental. Cooke's biographer, William Dunlap, recalls how the actor witnessed several performances by Macklin during the 1785-6 season and how "Cooke must be considered as Macklin's legitimate successor to the exclusion of all competition"

⁶⁶For more on Cooke's prominence in both America and Britain see Wilmeth's *Machiavel of the Stage* and Francis' *Old New York*.

⁶⁷There has been much speculation not only about his parents but also his place of birth. Dunlap, Cooke's earliest biographer, believed the actor when he said he was born in Westminster but notes that "Most of his biographers in the periodical publications of England, speak of him as an Irishman, though some make Berwick the place of his birth" (25).

⁶⁸See Doran, pgs. 398 and Dunlap, vol. 2, pgs. 133-134.

(1:22). But Cooke was Macklin's legitimate successor in more than just theatrics. Like Macklin, Cooke was as well known for his onstage brilliance as his offstage flaws. For, in addition to being a belligerent drunk, Cooke fueled his reputation as a bad boy through professional rivalries and none so captured the public's imagination as much as feud with John Philip Kemble.

The Cooke-Kemble rivalry was, in many ways, a physical manifestation of two competing views of British identity: the gentleman verses the cockney. In this theatrical representation of Britishness, Kemble manifested the proper Englishman whereas Cooke embodied its cockney underbelly. Kemble, a Shakespearean actor of high regard, embodied everything that Cooke did not: an established acting pedigree, an awareness of social conventions, a savvy theatrical business sense, and a classical acting style. Kemble had constructed a proper British sensibility predicated on tradition, taste, and capitalism. Cooke, on the other hand, was the bastard child of working-class parents and was more interested in a full pint than a full pocketbook. Cooke's performances were drawn from raw emotion rather than formal training. Cooke, in many ways, was the anti-Kemble: the unseemly underbelly of British culture that they tried to ignore.

Unsurprisingly, audiences located Cooke's and Kemble's different performances of masculinity in the actors' bodily differences. For instance, Kemble was described by critics as "noble and refined" his figure being a "very graceful, manly figure" whose "naturally commanding stature adds great dignity to those picturesque attitudes which he delights to study and exhibit" (qtd. in Dunlap 1:120). Cooke, conversely, was portrayed as his mirror image, Kemble's dark double: "The most prominent features in the physiognomy of Cooke are a long and somewhat hooked nose of uncommon breadth

between the eyes, which are fiery, dark, and at times terribly expressive, with prominent lids and flexible brows” (qtd. in Dunlap 1:120). Even Cooke’s biographer, William Dunlap, concedes that “Mr. Kemble’s fine face and figure, must, in some characters, have given him a superiority” and that Kemble’s noble features “added to his better education, and continued study as an actor, a gentleman, and a scholar, must place him eminently above competition” in some parts all before conceding Richard the Third to Cooke because of he fits his “quick, abrupt, and impetuous” attitudes better (1:121). Cooke, it seems, was fit for the tyrant, the misunderstood monster, while Kemble was made for royalty. The result was that audiences viewed the “quick, abrupt, and impetuous” masculinity of Cooke as entertaining whereas the “noble and refined” masculinity of Kemble was awe-inspiring.

But Cooke’s physical disadvantage and his lack of an acting pedigree did not stop him from openly challenging the monarch of the British theatre. Indeed, Cooke was interested in challenging not only the monarch but also his monopoly over acceptability. The Cooke-Kemble rivalry began while Cooke was still in the provinces. In the London off-season, London players would often tour the provinces, joining existing theatre troupes to entertain vacationing theatergoers. It was in the provinces where Cooke first used his performances of Shakespeare’s villains, characters such as Richard III, Macbeth, and Shylock, to play out his own rivalry with Kemble, merging his offstage dislike with his onstage behavior.⁶⁹ On one occasion, Kemble chastised Cooke for his “imperfect” acting in a previous scene, whereupon a fight ensued and ended with Cooke yelling: “I’ll tell you what, I’ll not have your faults fathered upon me! And damn me, black Jack, if I

⁶⁹ See Dunlap vol. 1, pg. 116, and Molloy pg. 132.

don't make you tremble in your pumps one of these days yet!'" (Dunlap 1:86). Cooke insultingly referred to Kemble as "black Jack," a troubling allusion to Kemble's dark complexion. But the nickname "black Jack" also implies that it is Kemble, and not Cooke, who is the real villain, "passing" for someone he is not. Cooke, as this example illustrates, might not be perfect according to Kemble's standards, but at least he is an honest scoundrel.

And Cooke was an honest scoundrel in so far as he did not hide his imperfections from the British public, but rather, reveled in the differences between himself and Kemble. Unlike Kemble, Cooke was known for his personable attitude, what he referred to as his "conviviality." While Kemble prided himself on his stately, almost monarchical, presence, Cooke was a product of the working class who fashioned himself as an everyman, a John Bull type, who was interested in good food, good company, and, of course, good alcohol. And while this identity coupled with his willingness to challenge Kemble's "noble and dignified" persona certainly charmed audiences, it would also be Cooke's downfall. Cooke's conviviality had its foundations in alcoholism and it would be this serious addiction that would ultimately overcome his acting abilities, turning his much-admired genius into little more than delirious memories.

Cooke had first taken to drinking on the provincial circuit, but after the failed debut in London, his drinking became a full-blown addiction. Some have suggested that Cooke's "conviviality" was possibly the reason for his initial rejection from London since by then the time of his debut it was possible that "his reputation for 'conviviality' had outstripped his reputation as an actor and no London manager would have him" (Highfill 3:453). It was not that Cooke was unaware of the toll drinking takes on the body.

Indeed, on August 13, 1794, when Cooke was still in the provinces, he wrote in his journal about the sad case of “a certain clergyman, who is said to be a man of literature and abilities” who frequented the same establishment as Cooke. The actor wrote how this learned man, “dirty, drunk, and foolish,” had aroused pity in Cooke, leading him to muse that “Drunkenness is the next leveller to death; with this difference, that the former is always attended, with shame and reproach while the latter, being the certain lot of mortality, produces sympathy, and may be attended with honour” (Dunlap 1:60). And while Cooke hopes that he “shall never forget him,” this exemplar ultimately did little to curb the actor’s drinking either in the provinces or once he triumphantly returned to London.

Indeed, part of Cooke’s reputation as an actor was built on his ability to transcend his personal faults. A writer of the *Morning Post*, for instance, referred to Cooke’s genius as evident “despite of gross faults” and that he “will justly maintain Mr. Cooke in high estimation; for the audience have scarce time to reflect on a palpable failure of this actor, before they are cheated out of their retrospect by some bold and successful essay of his genius” (qtd. in Hare 195). And the British press at large was quick to both praise and chastise Cooke for what they viewed as his spilt personality, his genius and his madness.

As the anonymous poet *The Thespian Review* (1806) tell us:

Cooke, who can act—strange skill!—and reach the goal,

When liquid robbers have his reason stole:

Cooke never elegant--almost sans grace,

Trusting to genius to display his face!

Who, in despite of figure and of voice,

For Roscius' chair, would still be Shakespeare's choice.

Great as he is, his faults are clear as day,

And he that mimics, most those faults display;

Faults which our reason ne'er can overlook;

Yet we must bear them—they are part of Cooke.

His strong sarcastic grin—sardonic smiles!

His bolt-like eyes, when, threat'ning, he reviles!

His sneer—his "Guess"—applause will always tax—

And ev'ry actor bows to Pertinax. (qtd. in Highfill 3:460)

This poetic criticism encapsulates the public's tumultuous, bipolar relationship with Cooke. For this author and many others, Cooke is entertaining, exciting, and genius. He is the beloved Sir Pertinax and the rightful heir to Roscius. Cooke is able to capture his audience's attention with his "sarcastic grin," his "bolt-like eyes," and his "sneer." And yet, these very qualities also make him a monster. Cooke is "threatening," "reviling," and "sardonic." He thrills and excites but also repels. Indeed, Cooke is never "elegant" or "graceful" and even lacks the ability to reason, making him into something of a monster. Perhaps the final lines of this unwholesome tribute best summarize Cooke's popular reputation: "*Revere his talents, actors! but reject/His orgies, vile! if ever you except/To reap or honour, or the golden need,/For breathing sweetly on the Thespian reed*"(qtd. in Highfill 3:460). Cooke may have been talented, he may have even been a genius, but as this critic declares, he was certainly no role model.

Cooke's alcoholism would eventually cost him the adoration of London audiences. He gained a reputation for showing up late, slurring speeches, missing cues,

or skipping engagements altogether, and audiences had grown tired of his antics.⁷⁰ In response to the public's criticism, the bad boy took to openly insulting and provoking his audiences. A telling incident occurred in Liverpool, where a disgruntled audience "demanded an apology from Cooke, who was not in a fit state to appear before them at the time; —'Apology from George Frederick Cooke!' [the actor] cried, advancing to the front: 'Take it from this remark: there is not a brick in your infernal town but what is cemented by the blood of a slave!'" (Hawkins 2:149). Despite Cooke's insights into the corruption underwriting British imperial identity, the press used the incident to lampoon Cooke as a drunk, and his once-adoring audience agreed.⁷¹

Cooke's insistence on provoking the press and exacerbating an already tenuous relationship with Kemble, however, had dire professional consequences.⁷² Cooke's antagonism of the public and his feud with Kemble ultimately resulted in Cooke's exile from the theatrical community, specifically, and Britain, in general. By 1810, Cooke had become "an outcast from his own country, for he had exhausted the patience of the English public, always exacting, by his consistent and flagrant errancy" (Playfair 200).

⁷⁰ Cooke's dissipated behavior was recorded by Playfair: "Time after time he stumbled on to the stage so drunk that he could scarcely remember the lines of his part; and quite often he indulged in his habit of not appearing at all" (200).

⁷¹ Dunlap describes the 1809-10 season as particularly trying for Cooke whose drinking had reached its pinnacle. Cooke, according to his biographer "came to the theatre, and created riot and confusion, by insisting upon going before the public, utterly incompetent to perform that for which he was pledged" (104). The audience would respond in kind as they did on January 8, 1810, when they refused to listen to Cooke's apology: "he was interrupted by plaudits, and dismissed" (106).

⁷² FitzSimons summarizes Cooke's career thusly: "George Frederick Cooke, a vigorous, naturalistic actor, who carried his audiences along by the violence of his passions and the rapidity of his transitions. But Cooke had no staying powers. He was usually drunk when he played, and it was said that the drunker he was the better he acted. He did not diminish the reputation of Kemble, who continued to reign as the undisputed monarch of the English stage" (51).

As his popularity waned at home, Cooke came to America as an exile from British society, humiliated and virtually penniless, in the hope of starting over. Cooke's decision to leave the London theatre scene was met with disbelief on both sides of the Atlantic: "Wags commented that visiting America would be punishment enough for his desertion of the English theatre; even when he was announced to be in New York, unbelieving Englishmen in that city claimed he must be an imposter—'Cooke come to America! Pooh!'" (Highfill 3:461). But Cooke was steadfast in his commitment to leave behind the jeering crowds, the negative press, and the disapproving glances of "black Jack" Kemble and, after a forty-day voyage, Cooke landed in the former British colonies.

Upon arrival, Cooke found himself greeted by an interested, if skeptical, public. After a few performances, Cooke was able to garner the interest and adoration of the America public: "The Americans paid Cooke greater honour than ever was or ever would have been accorded him in his own country" (Playfair 201). The Americans were enthusiastic that Cooke had come to perform in their theatres. He was, after all, the first major actor to leave the famed playhouses of London to tour in America. In many ways, Cooke's arrival legitimated the fledgling American theatre that was still heavily dependent on British plays and playwrights for material.⁷³ American audiences, rife with anti-British sentiments, commiserated with Cooke's seemingly unfair treatment by and expulsion from Britain and welcomed him. For the first time in Cooke's chaotic life, he had secured a social position that was compatible with his talents and proclivities: he had steady employment, adoring audiences, and garnered the interest of the nation's most

⁷³For more on the early American theatre see Shattuck's *Shakespeare on the American Stage* (1987), Bank's *Theatre Culture in America* (1997), Richards' *Drama, Theatre, and Identity* (2005), and Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots* (2009).

powerful citizens. More importantly, spending more than a month at sea had foisted upon him the opportunity to sober up and he had determined to make a mark in America and return to London triumphantly.

But, like many things in Cooke's life, this was not to be. The actor found America dull and the theatre community middling. He scoffed at his American audiences just as he did his British ones. When asked to perform for President Madison, Cooke not only refused the invitation but "said that he had once had the honour of performing before the King of England and that he would not besmirch that record now by stooping to entertain the 'King of the Yankee-Doodles'" (Playfair 200). He had quickly returned to drinking and was again missing performances. Audiences were quickly disillusioned with the great actor and Cooke returned the sentiment. While the actor flourished for time in the land of opportunity, Cooke was ultimately unable to forget his past life in Britain and, as result, "failed to grasp his golden opportunity at starting life anew; under the stimulus of the admiration of riotous admirers he lapsed into his former habits and his 'indispositions' once more became noticeable" (Skinner 225). For Cooke, Britain represented a past that he could never return to and America represented a present from which he could not escape.

Cooke would not escape America. After a lifetime of struggling with alcoholism, Cooke was in ill health, which required assistance and bed-rest. At this time, Cooke had developed a severe case of *delirium tremens*, which came with physical incapacitation and neurological damage. With his health failing, he wanted to return to Britain, but the onset of the War of 1812 left him stranded: the last gasp of Britain's colonial efforts in America doomed Cooke to die away from his homeland. As he lay dying, his thoughts

were clearly across the Atlantic: “turning to Master Payne, he in his half whispering manner added, ‘I don’t want to die in this country—John Kemble will laugh’” (Dunlap 333). Despite having found the recognition that he so craved, Cooke was still haunted by his British history and the people, like Kemble, that influenced him as an actor and a man.

While Cooke’s self-destruction was pitiable, it was by no means surprising. It appeared to be the inevitable ending to a life lived on the edge of society, on the very limits of acceptability and decency. Watching the actor’s descent into alcoholism, financial ruin, and mental decay, British audiences used him as an exemplar for the dangers of transgressing social decorum, frequently alluding to him as a tragic tale of talent wasted. What we learn from Cooke, from his self-destructive drinking to his professional ruinous feuding, is that the story of the bad boy celebrity is usually a didactic one.

The tales of wasted genius have something to teach us about our own place in society. Indeed, part of the attraction to bad boy celebrities is their ephemeral nature or the communal belief that such reckless behavior will ultimately result in self-destruction. Spectators postulate that living outside the circumscribed boundaries is taboo for a reason. They assume that dangerous consequences await those that take such risks. But, despite its danger, audiences also view the bad boy with desire. The spectators are drawn to the bad boy because of what he embodies. The bad boy is a physical manifestation of “what if”: what if we were to transgress society’s rules? What if we were to reject society’s restrictive ideas about identity and community? What if we joined those who do? Of course, there are some who will be drawn to seek the answers to these questions through

emulation and impersonation of the bad boy figure, possibly to their own destruction. But most spectators are eager to watch from the relative safety of society's confines, to project onto the figure of the bad boy their own fantasies and desires without the danger of having done so. For them, the intensity of the bad boy appeal results from their suspicion that they are watching, waiting, for the epic fall of such a meteoric rise. And, when the bad boy, pushed to the physical and mental limits of his own innate desire for destructive activities and those of a demanding public, does eventually fall, those who are watching use the bad boy's self-destruction as evidence for maintaining the *status quo*. The "what if" questions answer themselves.

3.2 Cooke and Kean: The Influence of the Undead

While Edmund Kean claimed to have never met Cooke nor seen him act, having been in the provinces by the time Cooke shipped off to America, Kean's acquaintances, the public, and the press were quick to note the personal and professional resemblance.⁷⁴ And, with the memory of Cooke fresh in their minds, British audiences looked at Kean with both interest and apprehension. The public's impressions of Kean were formed from their remembrances of Cooke. For instance, Byron, who briefly served on the Drury Lane subcommittee, noted a striking similarity between a young Kean and the now dead Cooke. On February 20, 1814, Byron reflected on his observation of Kean, saying, "He is worth meeting; and I hope, by getting to good society, he will be prevented from falling like Cooke. He is greater now on the stage, and off he should never be less" (Marchand 3:245). Byron's diary reflection would prove eerily prophetic for, only a few

⁷⁴Hawkins, a Kean biographer, is particularly skeptical about the Kean-Cooke relationship: "Kean told John Howard Payne that he had never seen Cooke, which may be true inasmuch as Cooke was away from England after the spring of 1810" but reminds his readers that "we cannot trust Kean's word for that" (330).

months later, the public began to read Kean's off-stage behavior by remembering Cooke's. On March 26, 1816, Kean failed to make a stage appearance and blamed his absence on an "accident" involving a carriage. The British press, however, was more than skeptical about the excuse and used it

to invoke memories of George Frederick Cooke, who had often been found lying senseless in a tavern when he should have been on the stage: and, without actually contradicting Edmund's story, they made thinly veiled suggestions that he had really gone off on one of his celebrated carousals and had got so drunk that he had been physically incapable of returning to London. (Playfair 158)

After just two years, Kean and Cooke were linked in the imagination of the public and press. While Kean's off-stage behavior was certainly considered outlandish by nineteenth-century standards, the public's perception of him was tinted by his similarities with Cooke, and their reaction to Kean was dictated by their past experience with Cooke. Cooke had tried the patience of the British public with his antics. Knowing Cooke's legacy, Kean knew the potential consequences of his behavior. But he could also see how to profit from it. After all, Cooke knew how to capture the public's attention, but where he had failed to translate his off-stage notoriety to an on-stage presence, Kean would succeed.⁷⁵

Upon perusing any of Kean's several biographies, one quickly discovers that recovering the "real" Kean is nearly impossible. Under layers of historical and biographical detritus, there exists a man who was prone to revising his life's story whenever the truth seemed inconvenient or unexciting. The biographies themselves often

⁷⁵Kean showed his gratitude to Cooke by erecting a monument to him in New York.

vacillate between trying to prove a particular event either correct or absurd.⁷⁶ What emerges in the biographies, then, is a character persona that Kean performed through self-fashioned narratives that were intentionally complex and always entertaining. Kean's performance of this public persona meant blending his private and public lives, and, by doing so, he turned even the most mundane events of everyday life into a platform to amuse. Known as a hard-drinking ne'er-do-well, he would drunkenly ride around town on his horse, Shylock, reciting Shakespeare with relative impunity.⁷⁷ Reputed to be an eccentric, he lived up to those expectations by keeping a pet lion in the drawing room.⁷⁸ While there are many more examples in his biographies, these instances highlight Kean's propensity for the rebelliousness, to live outside the rules that dictated proper society. He understood that audiences wanted sensation, entertainment, and intrigue, and these he provided in spades. From affairs with actresses and statesmen's wives to stories of wild, drunken escapades, he bolstered his celebrity persona as the consummate bad boy celebrity.⁷⁹

As a result, much of what we know about Kean's life is the subject of great debate.⁸⁰ Kean, as not concerned with narrative coherence but, rather, with creating and

⁷⁶Kean's biographers have been many and varied throughout the years and include Cornwall, *The Life of Edmund Kean* (1835), Hawkins, *The Life of Edmund Kean* (1869), Molloy, *The Life and Adventures* (1897), Skinner, *The Madfolk of the Theatre: Ten Studies in Temperament* (1928), Hillebrand, *Edmund Kean* (1933), Playfair, *Kean: The Life and Paradox* (1950) and *The Flash of Lightning* (1983), Disher, *Mad Genius* (1950), FitzSimons, *Fire from Heaven* (1976), and Kahan, *The Cult of Kean* (2006).

⁷⁷See Cornwall, pg. 90 and Molloy pg. 174.

⁷⁸See Cornwall, pg. 135, vol. 2; Hawkins, pgs. 334; and Kahan, pg. 3.

⁷⁹As Jeffery Cox has suggested, the hero-villain character itself is based on late-eighteenth century libertines (27).

⁸⁰Kean's biographers have been many and varied throughout the years and include Cornwall, *The Life of Edmund Kean* (1835), Hawkins, *The Life of Edmund Kean* (1869), Molloy, *The Life and Adventures*

maintaining a public persona based on enticing stories about his extravagant behavior, created a nexus of fact and fiction by creating and perpetuating rumors about the date of his birth, his mistresses, and his theatrical success. Kean, according to his biographers, was most likely born in 1789. Harold Hillebrand, a Kean biographer, suggests either March 17, 1789 or November 4, 1787, cautioning the reader “there is no reason to suppose that either are correct, but of the two the second is more likely” (3). Likewise, Raymund FitzSimons, another Kean biographer, laments, “Even the date of birth is uncertain, and, again, Kean is not to be trusted on this point, for he always made himself out to be younger than he was” (1). His parents, based largely on anecdotal evidence, were the actress Ann Carey and a man variously called Edward, Aaron, or Edmund Kean who probably worked as an architect (Kahan 4, Hawkins 4, Cornwall 5). Kean’s father abandoned his family early in Kean’s life, and, as a result, rumors about his identity began to surface. Kean himself was certainly at the center of the confusion: “If his picturesque stories could be believed, he would be as great a Romantic hero as he was a Romantic actor: he always claimed the Duke of Norfolk as his father” (FitzSimons 1). In a society that historically charted identity along patrilineal descent, the Duke of Norfolk, with his wealth and prestige, certainly made an attractive substitute for Kean’s own absentee father. While this story was more extravagant than believable, rumors such as this lent Kean a certain mystique and left the public wanting more.

Having garnered the attention of the London theatergoers, Kean set about making a name for himself, even if that meant dethroning Kemble. Kean was in direct

(1897), Skinner, *The Madfolk of the Theatre* (1928), Hillebrand, *Edmund Kean* (1933), Playfair, *Kean: The Life and Paradox* (1950) and *The Flash of Lightning* (1983), Disher, *Mad Genius* (1950), FitzSimons, *Fire from Heaven* (1976), and Kahan, *The Cult of Kean* (2006).

competition with Kemble for the British public's attention (and capital). Audiences and critics were quick to compare Kean with Kemble who, they determined, could not be more different. The famed theatre critic William Hazlitt recorded in *The Chronicle*: “[Kean's] acting style is more significant, more pregnant with meaning, more varied and alive in every part than any we have almost ever witnessed...It is not saying too much of Mr. Kean, though it is saying a great deal, that he is all that Mr. Kemble wants of perfection” (qtd. in Skinner 250). Unlike Kemble, who came from an acting family, Kean was the bastard son of working-class parents. Kean's acting style was expressive and physical whereas Kemble's was classic and exact. Kemble was the manager of Covent Garden who preferred the company of the rich and well connected; Kean was constantly in debt and, when offered the opportunity to join polite society's dinner parties, he instead chose to indulge in the vices around the theatre district.

Kean's unwillingness to conform to professional or public standards created and perpetuated by actors like Kemble was not lost on theatergoers who enjoyed Kean's more provocative interpretations of the great British tragedies. Theatre critics such as Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, favored Kean's acting style to Kemble's. Hunt, one of the preeminent theatre critics of the early nineteenth century, summarizes the difference between Kemble and Kean, thusly:

The distinction between Kean and Kemble may be briefly stated to be this: that Kemble knew there was a difference between tragedy and common life, but did not know in what it consisted, except in manner, which he consequently carried to excess, losing sight of the passion. Kean knows the real thing, which is the height of the passion, manner following it as a matter of course, and grace being

developed from it in proportion to the truth of the sensation, as the flower issues from the entireness of the plant, or from all that is necessary to produce it. (224)

Here, Hunt compares Kemble's acting style to Kean's, specifically relating the use of their on-stage presence—their bodies—to communicate meaning. Kemble and, consequently his body, can only communicate the “difference between tragedy and common life” by being moving in exacting ways, what Hunt refers to as his “manner.” Kean, conversely, works himself into a fervor, “the height of the passion,” while not as exacting as Kemble's manner, does have a certain communicative element to it, what Hunt calls “the truth of the sensation.” Hunt's comparison is emblematic of comparisons between Kemble and Kean at the beginning of Kean's career, which focused on the differences in their acting style and, implicitly, the differences of their bodies.

Hunt was clearly enamored of Kean's talents, which may help to explain why he is alone in likening Kean to a flower. Kean was certainly known as a physical actor who could work himself and his audience into the “height of passion,” but he did do so largely despite his body. According to Douglas Abel's study of Kean, the actor's height actually contributed to his physical acting style: “Because he had no grandeur in repose, and because his acting was so powerful when it was energized, Kean needed to be animated” (102). Kemble's tall, statuesque physique coupled with his fine features were certainly more common for actors than Kean's diminutive build—he was five foot four—and dark features that lead people to conclude that his father was either of Jewish or Italian descent. Jeffery Kahan, for instance, lists several rumors that were largely based on Kean's acting repertoire: “journalists were so convinced by Kean's performance of Shylock that they mistook him for a Jew. One even affirmed that Kean's real name was

Cohen. After his success as Iago, he was described as having Italian ‘swarthinness, his eyes very large and dark’” (4). Fellow players often made Kean’s body the subject of ridicule. The focus of much of Kean’s detractors was on his body, which, they surmised, was not the proper conduit for tragedy. Kean’s body was not “kingly,” not like Kemble’s more regal height: “Taller actors complained “God renounce me! ‘tis only necessary nowadays to be under four feet high, have bandy legs and a hoarseness and mince my liver! But you’ll be thought a great tragedian” (Ruggles 9). What emerges from the description by these “taller actors” is a grotesque figure: a dwarf-like man who walks on bowed legs and speaks with a raspy, discordant voice. In addition to transforming Kean into this hideous body, these qualities stand in opposition to the body type of a “proper” tragedian. Kean’s body was cast as something different and, if we are to believe these “taller actors,” something grotesque. Joe Cowen, a contemporary of both Kean and Kemble, recorded his first impression at seeing the highly touted Kean appear on the stage: “I was prepared to see a small man; but, diminished by the unusual distance and his black dress, and a mental comparison with Kemble’s princely person, he appeared a perfect pygmy” (Molloy 1: 185). As a result, Kean was painfully aware of his small stature in a profession, which traditionally rewarded men like Kemble.

Kean, perhaps more than any actor before him, was commonly described as a grotesque figure. In Britain, Kean was commonly represented as the humpbacked Richard III, an allusion to both his most famous character and to his short, disproportionate stature. (Figure 3.1) Perhaps best known as the “rudely stamp’d,” “deform’d,” “unfinish’d” monarch, Richard III became an appropriate representation of Kean whose disproportionate stature coupled with his bad boy celebrity image made him

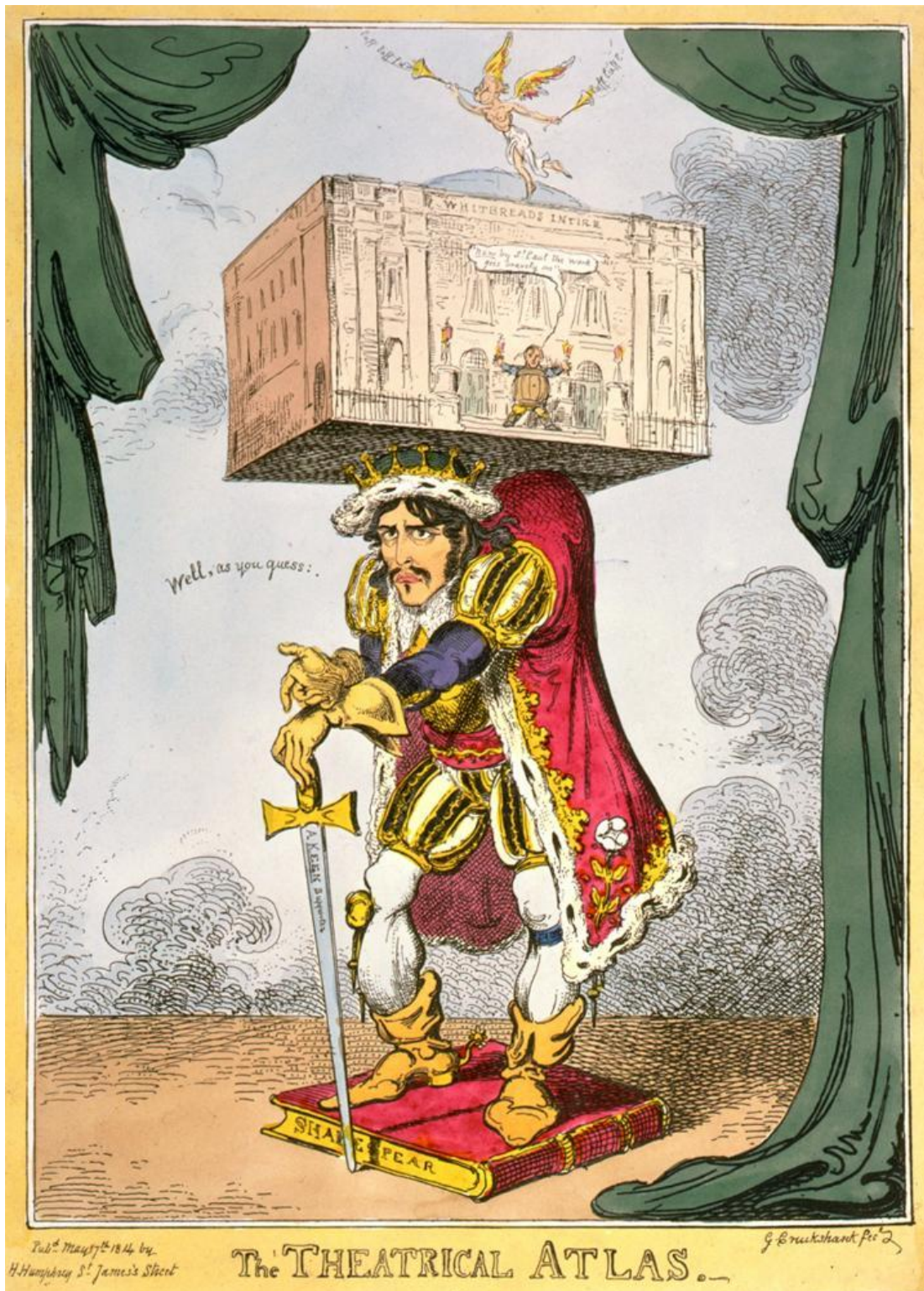


Figure 3.1 *Theatrical Atlas* by George Cruickshank. British Museum.

an open target for such comparisons. Rather than giving up, Kean used his stature and darker features to his advantage. He chose characters like Richard III, Othello, Shylock, who would compliment his physique and accentuate the differences between him and Kemble. He used these characters to intimidate other actors who were also vying for top billing, playing out his rivalries within the context of Shakespeare's revenge tragedies.⁸¹ And he found that being the outcast was not only enjoyable, but also lucrative. The audience, who knew about Kean's professional jealousies and were informed by theatre reviewers and gossip, responded to these antics by decrying Kean in polite circles and by filling the playhouses. Kean may not have been the manifestation of traditional British sensibility, but his roguish attitude toward the establishment resonated with audiences who also felt stifled by established codes of conduct.

Kean, the savvy provocateur, recognized that playing bad boy had social and monetary potential and opportunities to exploit this role certainly presented themselves in the greenrooms of Drury Lane, in theatre district taverns, and in the streets of London. The success of Kean's persona (and, of course, Kean himself) can be attributed to his ability to capitalize on any opportunity that would link him in the public's imagination to his off-stage extravagance. Instead of mounting an on-stage public relations campaign, Kean chose characters that would bolster the public's impression of him as a ne'er-do-well. Kean was known for playing the bad boys of dramatic history—Richard III, Othello, Shylock—who were fashioned on Kean's own physical, expressive acting style described by Coleridge. By playing these characters, Kean linked himself in the popular

⁸¹See Kahan, pgs. 23-27 for more on his rivalry with Macready; see Genest for more on his rivalry with Somerville, pgs. 533-4, vol. 8; see Hawkins for more on his rivalry with O'Neill, pg. 29, vol. 2.

imagination with their emotional and mental complexity and their devil-may-care attitudes.

Kean understood that audiences wanted sensation, entertainment, and intrigue, and these he provided in spades. Kean made no secret of his personal liaisons for “On the nights he played, the length of the intervals between acts could never be calculated with any accuracy, for he copulated in his dressing-room regardless of the waiting audience” (FitzSimons137). From affairs with actresses and statesmen’s wives to stories of wild, drunken escapades, he embraced his darker passions and bolstered his persona as the consummate “bad boy” celebrity. London, after all, was full of Bettertons, Garricks, and Kembles who were content to play the hero’s part. Kean would never be the hero—he was too narcissistic, too licentious, and too eccentric for that. Rather, he would play the part of the hero-villain, a man loved and despised by the British public.

Thus, Kean was loved and despised in equal measure by the British public. But with his increasing notoriety, the actor quickly learned that being a legitimate celebrity brought even more uncertainty and ambiguity about his own identity and place in society. Kean was a professional player and, as such, straddled the line between high and low society never quite knowing or understanding his place within the social hierarchy.⁸² He never felt comfortable at dinner parties where the discussions centered on philosophy, poetry, and politics. Even with Lord Byron acting as his sponsor, the actor found himself “at dinner with stiff-necked aristocrats, polished wits, poets and philosophers, deadly

⁸²Actors and actresses of this period such as Kemble and Mary Robinson often found themselves in the same ambiguous social position as Kean. The actress, Mary Wells, for instance was often described as an eccentric, an outsider, and even “mad” (an epithet also used to describe Kean). For more on Wells, see Engel, “Notorious Celebrity.”

bored and ill at ease” (Skinner 254). Kean enjoyed his fame and social status; indeed, he thrived on public recognition and admiration. Yet, Kean despised being seen as the entertainment, the plaything, of the elite and the wealthy. Kean learned that he would always be an entertaining but eccentric pariah to polite society.

Finding himself in social exile, Kean assumed the role as an eccentric outsider, a character that he came not to accept but enjoy. He would often turn his well-known eccentricity into a public spectacle. Most infamously, he kept a pet lion and, as was reported, “it was a common sight to see them seated together in the stern of a wherry, being rowed up and down the Thames” (FitzSimons 116). This outsider attitude, coupled with his fondness for drinking and womanizing, eventually made the actor a popular target for sensation columns in the press and for the public’s moral outrage.

But, while sensation and outrage brought in audiences, they also kept the audience at arms length. By the time of Kean’s American tour, his personal and professional lives were in shambles. Personally, Kean faced a public relations disaster on every front: several women brought paternity proceedings against him and his creditors were eager to recuperate their investments before he sailed across the Atlantic. According FitzSimons, two of these incidents occurred within a week of each other:

On 11 September, at Bow Street Court, a young woman brought paternity proceedings against him. Kean claimed that during the relevant time, the previous October, he had been away from London, but the court ordered him to pay seven shillings and sixpence a week for the upbringing of the child. On 14 September, he was up at Clerkenwell Court for a similar reason, but when the girl was called

upon to give evidence, she admitted that she could not be certain who the father was. (144)

Professionally, his reputation as a womanizer and an alcoholic were starting to effect his reception at Drury Lane. Audiences grew tired of waiting for the leading man who was entertaining women in his dressing room when he was supposed to be on stage. By 1820, Kean had grown tired of the British public and they of him. Kean was no longer the darling he was once and “he was finding it difficult enough to squeeze applause from audiences who were no longer very enthusiastic about him. In London they took him for granted. Even in the provinces they had grown a trifle used to him. He was starving for want of admiration” (Playfair 186). Finding only disappointment in Britain, Kean left for America in the hope of winning over new audiences, taking advantage of the largely untapped American market, and perhaps most importantly, hoping to leave the British public anticipating his return. America was Kean’s land of opportunity just as it had been for Cooke almost a decade before.

After just two seasons, Kean’s alcoholism caused him to show up late for performances or miss them altogether, drawing the ire of both the public and press. By the time of Kean’s American tour, his personal and professional lives were in shambles. Personally, Kean faced a public relations disaster on every front: several women brought paternity proceedings against him and his creditors were eager to recuperate their investments before he sailed across the Atlantic. Professionally, audiences grew tired of waiting for the leading man who was entertaining women in his dressing room when he was supposed to be on stage: “the length of the intervals between acts could never be calculated with any accuracy, for he copulated in his dressing-room regardless of the

waiting audience” (FitzSimons 137). By 1820, Kean had grown tired of the British public and they of him. Kean was no longer the favorite he was once and “was finding it difficult enough to squeeze applause from audiences who were no longer very enthusiastic about him. In London they took him for granted. Even in the provinces they had grown a trifle used to him. He was starving for want of admiration” (Playfair 186). Finding only disappointment in Britain, Kean left for America in the hope of winning over new audiences, taking advantage of the largely untapped American market, and perhaps most importantly, hoping to leave the British public anticipating his return.

3.3 The Boston “Incident” and Peter Public

In 1820, Kean sailed for America in what he hoped would be an opportunity to recast himself, to forge an identity devoid of the scandals that haunted him in Britain. Having accepted this romanticized idea of America, Kean did not anticipate being cast, once again, in Cooke’s shadow. Cooke, who had been the first high profile British actor to come to America, had made a deep impression on his audiences with his unique acting style: “Cooke, who had spent the last two years of his life in America, until his death in 1812, still had his devoted followers, who were unwilling to allow that any other actor could equal his naturalistic style” (FitzSimons 146). Kean, rather than forge a new identity, was once again put on the offensive and forced to prove that his accolades were indeed deserved. To win over the Americans, he refrained from the drinking and carousing that had cost him personally and professionally in Britain (FitzSimons 148). When performing, Kean was grateful, humble, and, most importantly, timely. Audiences in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore raved. Kean, as Cooke found at his initial arrival, seemed to discover not only a second chance at fame but also a chance to

remake himself. Americans appreciated his performances where British audiences had taken him for granted. At first, Kean was able to win over a skeptical public and found the admiration that he so desperately craved or so it seemed.

Eventually, Kean, like Cooke, lapsed into his old habits: he began drinking heavily, showing up late, and taking his success for granted. All of these issues came to a head in his farewell appearance in Boston. Kean was scheduled to make an encore performance in Boston and, finding the crowd scant, he left the theatre to drink at a local pub. No sooner did Kean leave than theatergoers packed the house and the manager sent for a now intoxicated leading man. The bad boy Kean refused to perform, and the crowd was furious. Kean, who had made a living fashioning himself as the hero-villain, soon found that the Americans were all too ready to fashion him into a monster. The day after the Boston incident, the following “wanted” advertisement appeared in several major papers:

ONE CENT REWARD

Run away from the ‘Literary Emporium of the New World’, a stage-player, calling himself Kean. He may be easily recognized by his mis-shapen truck, his coxcomical, cockney manners, and his bladder actions. His face is as white as his own froth, and his eyes as dark as indigo. All persons are cautioned against harbouring the aforesaid vagrant, as the undersigned pays no more debts of his contracting, after this date. As he has violated his pledged faith to me, I deem it my duty thus to put my neighbours on their guard against him.

PETER PUBLIC (qtd. in FitzSimons 150)

Kean used the Boston incident to end his tour, but not before he had escalated the matter further and, effectually, proved Peter Public's point about British hubris.

Kean's response to the Boston audience and Peter Public appeared in the *National Advocate*. In a letter to the editor, the actor argued that the Americans' reactions were the result of cultural differences, "an actor, honoured, patronized in his native country, and enjoying a high rank in the drama, withheld his services under the impression that they were not duly appreciated"; Kean then told his American "compeers" that he came to act, not "to study the customs" (qtd. in Hawkins 2:162). Unsatisfied with this glancing shot, Kean decides to make his differentiation of British and American culture absolute:

Before I left England I was apprised how powerful an agent the press was in a free country, and I was admonished to be patient under the lashes that awaited me; and at a great sacrifice of feeling I have submitted to their unparalleled severity and injustice. I was too proud to complain, and suffered in silence; but I have no hesitation in saying that the conduct I pursued was that which every man would pursue under the same circumstances in the country where Shakspeare [sic] was born and Garrick has acted. (qtd. in Hawkins 2:162)

Here, Kean juxtaposes his "American compeers" with his "native country," the land of Shakespeare and Garrick, in order to paint his American audiences as uncultured upstarts. To this end, Kean aligns Britishness with tradition, history, and taste while simultaneously maligning Americans for their comparative lack. Americans might have their "free country" and their power of the "press," but according to Kean they lack the sophistication of their British counterparts. Kean, therefore, was right to forgo the Boston engagement because his "conduct" was keeping with British sensibility, a sensibility

obviously missing in America. He was able to paint himself the consummate victim, “too proud to complain,” left to “suffer in silence,” at the “unparalleled severity and injustice” of these tactless Americans.

What we see happening through Peter Public’s description of Kean, moreover, is the xenophobic reaction about Kean and his presumed Britishness. There is something, according to the advertisement’s author, that sets Kean apart from the Americans, namely Kean’s British sensibility, his “cockney manners.” The use of “cockney” here is important for our discussion in several ways, and, thus, requires some unpacking. Cockney, a word used to describe both a geographical area of London and the linguistic patterns of its inhabitants, is used here as slur to insinuate that Kean is uncouth. Of course, cockney also has class implications and is used here to also depict Kean as class inferior. Class, as we have seen, was a particularly vexed situation for players and even more so for Kean whose working-class background continued to haunt him. The result of this slur, therefore, is that it positions Kean as a social, political, and class inferior to his American audiences, and, as a insult pertaining directly to his British heritage, positions him, and by extension the British, as both inferior and Other.

By isolating Kean as Other, Peter Public paints the actor as a dangerous outsider that must be “guarded against,” and who cannot be trusted to honor a “pledged faith.” While one could easily accuse Peter Public of an equally dishonorable action here, the author begs our pardon because, after all, Kean “has violated his pledged faith,” and it is only fitting that our altruistic author look after his American “neighbors.” Thus, the advertisement concludes with a clear indication that the Americans, “us,” could not be more different than “them,” the British. Peter Public, however, is not content to paint

Kean as an Other and instead uses the opportunity to degrade him and, by extension the British.

The author uses the rhetorical strategy that is perhaps inherent in the us-them nationalist structure: demonizing the Other. Throughout the advertisement, Peter Public describes the actor as a monster, referring to “his mis-shapen trunk,” “froth,” and his “eyes as dark as indigo,” transforming him into something less than human, monstrous, even animalistic. Using this rhetoric, Peter Public was engaging nationalist tradition of demonizing the Other, but also, as we have seen, he was engaging in another pre-established discourse: mocking Kean’s untraditional body type. And it is this monstrous Kean, according to Peter Public, who represents the inverse of American identity: he lacks a sense of honor, duty, and obligation to his neighbor. In other words, Kean is the consummate Other, the manifestation of what the Americans are not or at least not any more.

And, what could be further from American independence and democracy than the British monarchy? It was in this vein that Kean was often viewed through the lens of Richard III whose grotesque figure certainly fits with Peter Public’s description of the “mis-shapen” Kean. Shakespeare’s Richard III suffered from a disfigurement that was as much physical as it was symbolic. The king’s two bodies—his physical body and his body politic—were interconnected: the health of the monarch dictated the health of the state. Certainly, this message was never more pertinent to the Americans or the British who had been dealing with the intermittent insanity of George III. For the Americans, Kean was seen as a product of the diseased British monarchy. As a result, his American audiences viewed Kean as a “mis-shapen” man whose “froth” and “eyes as dark as

indigo,” hinted at corruption so deep that it could only be the consequence of his proximity to the diseased British body politic.

While produced four years after Kean’s 1820-21 American tour, the image entitled *Kean in America* suggests that American audiences, too, conflated the actor and the character based on the physical irregularities.⁸³ (Figure 3.2) In the caricature, Kean is shown as a Richard III, being pelted with various items from gallery as he appeals to the divine right of kingship, using a slightly revised version uttered by Shakespeare’s Richard III: “Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale men/Rail on the Lord’s anointed—strike I say!” This haughty Richard-Kean serves as a direct contrast to the man in the second panel. The Richard-Kean in the second panel is not the triumphant Richard III, but the impotent Richard II. Reciting the soliloquy from act three, scene three, the new manifestation of the Richard-Kean acknowledges that he has lost control over his kingdom and his legacy by reading from the “Beggar’s Petition” near his feet: “The king shall be contented: must he lose/The name of king? o’ God’s name, let it go:/I’ll give my jewels for a set of beads;/My gorgeous palace for a hermitage;/My gay apparel for an almsman’s gown;—/My large kingdom for a little grave,/A little, little grave, an obscure grave;—/Or I’ll be buried in the king’s highway,/Some way of common trade—” This apologetic Richard-Kean kneels before two African-American spectators who in the previous panel were shown beneath him in the pit. Despite the tears and cries of this

⁸³While this illustration dates to Kean’s second American tour in 1825, it serves to illustrate the nationalist-fueled treatment of Kean by the American audience. Additionally, Kean’s equally disastrous second tour demonstrates Kean’s recursive behavior and his American audiences’ reiterative reaction. The similarities between his second tour and his first tour further suggest that America and American nationalism continued to be caught in a recursive and ultimately Gothic landscape.



Richard-Kean, the African-American spectators appear unmoved by this sudden and drastic change in his persona. Instead, they chastise the now-humbled Richard Kean saying, “he very bad man!” and “he very naughty man!!”

Certainly, many scholars, including Daphne A. Brooks, E. Patrick Johnson, Patricia A. Turner, and Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, have discussed the overt racial and racist representations of African-Americans in the nineteenth century in visual media and how performance of black identity tincture our past and present attitudes about African-American subjectivity. Turner and Wallace-Sanders looks specifically at the ways that the “mammy” figure influenced and continues to influence representations of African-American women, domesticity, and status while also drawing important connections to other popular stereotypes through the prevalence of blackface minstrel shows.⁸⁴ Drawing similar connections, Johnson offers a nuanced reading of how white culture largely appropriated these images, including the “mammy” figure, and how the black community itself “performs” black identity.⁸⁵ Brooks likewise examines African-American representations and performance in the nineteenth century by examining theatrical performances and suggesting that such performances “intervene in the spectacular and systematic representational abjection of black peoples” (5). As these critics demonstrate, caricature in the nineteenth century often deals with issues of race, theatre, and performance and can offer us insight not only into how racial identity performances were

⁸⁴ See Turner, especially Chapter Three: Back to the Kitchen, pgs. 41-68, Chapter Four: The Troping of Uncle Tom, pgs. 69-88, Chapter Eight: Ethnic Aliens, pgs. 147-153; and Wallace-Sanders, especially, Introduction, pgs. 1-12 and Chapter Four: Reconstructing Mammy, 73-92.

⁸⁵ See especially Introduction, pgs. 1-17 and Chapter Six: Performance and/as Pedagogy, pgs. 219-256.

created through the lens of white culture, but also how these images themselves act to both emphasize and proliferate a historicized and institutionalized racism.

Taking such qualifications into account, the two African-American spectators in *Kean in American* offer the unknown artist an interesting mouthpiece for serious political, social, and theatrical commentary.⁸⁶ Despite being typical demonstrations of the racist ideology of the time, they provide an interesting and relevant counterargument to Richard-Kean himself. While Richard-Kean attempts to further aggrandize himself and his legacy, these two rather humble spectators have more control over the current situation than does this fictional king. Kean, despite his crown and stage, has not authority over the unruly mob at his feet. The spectators, conversely, are part of the rabble that brings the fictional king literally to his knees. They possess neither the symbols of monarchy nor the public platform, but from their humbled position in the theatre and their even more humble position in the social hierarchy, they enact change.

Second, they demonstrate the power and authority of language, especially the performance of language. Richard-Kean has the power of the monarchical utterance not to mention the cultural authority of Shakespeare himself. The spectators, however, have neither power nor authority in their utterances. Indeed, the artist expressly forces them to speak in grammatical incorrect language as a nod to the poor education and illiteracy of the African-American population. The contrast here is remarkable: on one hand, we see Kean who possesses the words of the man considered to be the high-watermark of the English language; while on the other hand, we have the spectators who not only lack the eloquence and grandeur of Shakespeare, but also the rudimentary elements of the

⁸⁶Kahan discusses the racial implications of this caricature at length drawing parallels between this depiction of the 1825-26 tour and the earlier 1820-21 tour (124-125).

language itself. Yet, despite their verbal inadequacies, the two spectators are able to bring the grandstanding Kean to his knees with only a few short words: “he very bad man!” and “he very naughty man!!”

Finally, these characters remind the viewer of the social and national context with which Kean’s ultimate humiliation resides. These two characters provide a direct contrast to Kean’s social and national position. First, they are not royalty nor are they even in a position to play royalty, and in fact, the caricaturists goes out of the way to symbolize their humble status by placing them in the pit rather than the boxes; by their rudimentary language skills; by their exaggerated facial features reminiscent of physiognomy and phrenological studies of the day; and by their clothes, which are more appropriate for laboring than a day at the theatre. Even with the unquestionable nature of their social position and their lack of education, they demonstrate show more judgment and morality than Kean: Kean has indeed been “very bad” and “very naughty.” He has been “naughty” in his social encounters with the American public—and also the British public though that is not in question here—and he has been “bad” at acting and showing up for performances. The caricaturists message here, although delivered through racist means, is clear: even the most humble persons in American society are greater and more capable than the “kings” of England. Ultimately, *Kean in America* demonstrates how the haughty, ungrateful actor found himself marginalized by even the most socially isolated Americans.

In addition to the racial overtones of the piece, what makes this caricature important to our discussion is its use of other complex nationalist symbols that would have been both meaningful and obvious to the audiences who saw Kean in his 1820-21

tour. Chief among these symbols would have been Kean's connection with Shakespeare through both his performance of Shakespeare's plays and the connection Kean himself makes in his *National Advocate* reply where he reminds his audience that he is from the land where "Shakspeare [sic] was born." Kean was not certainly the first to frame his Britishness by using Shakespeare, and in fact, this assertion alluded to a larger cultural and political movement to associate Shakespeare with British nationalism. During the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, Shakespeare, as many scholars have suggested, was increasingly being discussed and celebrated as an icon of British national identity.⁸⁷

But the vexing national issue here is not simply Shakespeare's increasingly nationalist status in Britain. Kean, after all, was not only performing Shakespeare in his 1820-21 tour, he was also playing a king to an American audience who had overthrown monarchical rule not yet fifty years prior. Again, the caricature proves helpful in gauging the general sentiment of Americans towards their British counterparts. In the first panel, Kean's cries go unheeded: he has been forsaken by the divine right. The joke is that Kean is only playing at kingship and that his inflated sense of self-worth has caused him to see himself as an actual king—the same criticism Cruikshank alludes to in the "Theatrical Atlas" caricature. Beyond this basic criticism, the caricature makes the point that kingship—the basis of British national identity—is ultimately a performance and Kean, like the king of Britain, is a player performing a part. Thus, the damnation of

⁸⁷For more on Shakespeare in eighteenth-century Britain, see Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* and Rovee in "Everybody's Shakespeare": Representative Genres and John Boydell's *Winter's Tale*."

Kean and British nationalism is realized: Kean's is made to speak his own humiliation in the words of Shakespeare, a British national icon, and in the guise of a pretending king.

In painting Kean as a monstrous outsider, Peter Public's ultimate condemnation of Kean is not that he is un-American, but worse, he is British. Kean's response, of course, only served to further these feelings of animosity. In suggesting that Americans are uncultured upstarts, he plays upon their insecurities by reminding them that they still live with the ghost of their British predecessors.

3.4 Haunted Kings and Kingdoms: Ghosting, Nationalism, and the Gothic

What makes the Boston incident interesting is that it functions as a microcosm for the discussions about identity, nationalism, and history that were occurring on both sides of the Atlantic in the early nineteenth-century. I will now explore the ghostly relationship between Cooke and Kean and, by extension, Britain and America, to show how these discussions are present in the Cooke-Kean story. To do this, I will look at the way recent performance theory has discussed identity as a product of historical and social forces.

Performance theory has often been used to discuss performances that occur both within and beyond the theatrical space.⁸⁸ Ghosting, a term coined by theatre theorist Marvin Carlson, refers to the audience's reception of an actor where past experiences influence the way the audience reads the actor's present identity (7).⁸⁹ For example, an

⁸⁸Certainly, applying dramatic theories beyond the strict demarcations of the theatre space is not a new concept. Perhaps most famously, Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which posits that identity is based on the reiterative performance of dominate discourses. Also, see Roach's *It* and Engel's Introduction in *The Public's Open to Us All*.

⁸⁹Carlson draws from Roach's theorization of "surrogation" discussed in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. According to Roach, the players, rather than the performance, function as the

audience who had seen an actor perform Hamlet will compare his performance to previous actors playing Hamlet. Past experience might also include the actor's own repertoire. An audience might be accustomed to seeing an actor perform the role of Hamlet and, as a result, the audience's reception of his Macbeth will be influenced by their remembrance of the Hamlet performance. In addition, ghosting might occur when the audience has preexisting or outside knowledge about the actor that influences reception. For example, the audience might react differently if they know that an actor is having a liaison with his co-star. Ghosting, therefore, refers to the associative process of identity formation where the "ghost" of previous experience "haunts" the present reception.

While ghosting was originally conceived of as a theatrical phenomena, the Kean-Cooke relationship bears an analogous resemblance to the associative relationships described by Carlson. For example, Byron, who briefly served on the Drury Lane subcommittee, noted a striking similarity between a young Edmund Kean and the now dead Cooke. On February 20, 1814, Byron reflected on his observation of Kean, saying, "He is worth meeting; and I hope, by getting to good society, he will be prevented from falling like Cooke. He is greater now on the stage, and off he should never be less" (Marchand 3:245). While Kean's behavior was certainly considered outlandish by nineteenth-century standards, the public's perception of him was tinted by his similarities with Cooke, and their reaction to Kean was dictated by their past experience with Cooke. The similarity in their biographies, therefore, dictated the way people

moving parts of the theatrical experience, making the substitution of individual actors and actresses necessary for performance to continue after the death of the initial players and the introduction of new ones.

interpreted Kean's past actions and, as Byron's diary implies, the way they interpreted his future.

The ghost of Cooke's previous behavior and relationship to the public also haunted the way Kean was received by the press and the public. The British public's reaction to Kean was largely based on their previous history with Cooke, which turned relatively innocuous incidents like his carriage "accident" into a media circus. Cooke knew how to capture the public's attention, stealing the spotlight from Kemble if only for a brief moment. Cooke had failed to sustain the public's interest, overindulging himself to the point of destruction. Given this hindsight, Kean would attempt to revise Cooke's model, to walk between sensationalism and extravagance.

Kean was working to correct the errors of his predecessor and triumph where Cooke had failed. Kean, after all, was at a decided historical advantage. Right before Cooke's departure for America, Kemble himself was facing a public relations nightmare. The actor's popular image had been tarnished by the Old Price Riots, which painted the actor as elitist and, consequently, as un-British.⁹⁰ In 1809, Kemble, manager of the Covent Garden, reopened the theatre after a fire had destroyed the previous building. The cost of rebuilding the structure and replacing the costumes, props, and scenery lost in the fire put Kemble and the theatre in debt. To ebb the tide of bills, Kemble decided to raise prices, causing riots that lasted for over three months. Kemble's reputation would never fully recover, leaving him vulnerable to the up-and-coming Kean. With Kemble's waning popularity and the audience's social and political angst, Kean was poised to turn Cooke's failed model into an industry staple. But even with Kemble's collapse, Kean

⁹⁰See Moody, esp. 62-69.

found himself in the same position as Cooke: ignored, alienated, and ultimately exiled.

Kean could not escape Cooke's tarnished legacy anymore than he could escape himself.

Kean did indeed try to escape Cooke and himself in coming to America, but in trying to flee Cooke's influence, he ran headlong into it. As we have seen, Kean's initial reception by the American public was haunted by Cooke's memory. Theatergoers remembered Cooke's acting fondly and could not imagine that Kean had equal or greater talent. The historical and social processes of ghosting, therefore, fundamentally shaped Kean's identity. Kean, who had arrived in America in Cooke's shadow, fled Britain in the hope of a second chance: an opportunity to right previous wrongs and to win over new audiences. What he found, however, was Cooke's ghost lingering in the public's memories. Thus, Kean struggled to build an identity independent from his connection with Cooke that seemed to haunt him on both sides of the Atlantic.

In this way, the Kean's ghosting of Cooke functions as a microcosm for the American-British relationship in the early nineteenth century. America had been an independent nation for almost fifty years at the time of Kean's tour. During that span, the fledgling nation was invested in a nationalist movement that sought to define the American national character. While there are numerous studies debating and examining the makeup of the American national character, Erik H. Erikson, from his study, *Childhood and Society* (1950), provides what scholars view as the most influential definition of national identity and the most pertinent to our discussion.⁹¹ Beginning his

⁹¹For more on American nationalism, see Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (1955) and American Nationalism: An Interpretative Essay (1957), Luedtke's introduction in *Making America* (1992), Merritt, *Symbols of American Community, 1735-1775* (1996), Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* (1997), and Pollard's *The Literary Quest* (2008).

chapter, “Reflections on the American Identity,” Erikson views American national identity as an amalgamation of polarities resulting from a history of “extreme contrasts and abrupt changes” (286). This history what he refers to as

a truly American trait can be shown to have its equally characteristic opposite.

This, one suspects, is true of all “national character,” or (as I would prefer to call them) national identities—so true, in fact, that one may begin rather than end with the proposition that a nation’s identity is derived from the ways in which history has, as it were, counterpointed certain opposite personalities; the ways in which it lifts this counterpoint to a unique style of civilization, or lets it disintegrate into mere contradiction. (285)

Erikson’s definition of what he refers to as “national identities” emphasizes the historical nature of these processes and draws our attention to the particularly problem of the nascent American movement in the 1820s. For example, the most fundamental “counterpoint,” to use Erikson’s phrase, was the choice of democracy over monarchy. Americans believed that their democratic organization was both contrary and superior to the British monarchical system. Socially, nationalism refers to the shared hierarchies of value, history, experiences, or causes that are different from those held by other groups. Yet, for the democracy “counterpoint” and all of the differences between America and Britain that democracy engendered, the starting point would always be British. For nineteenth-century Americans, the social expression of nationalism was most problematic to the creation of an American national character, since they shared many characteristics such as a shared history, culture, and language with the British. Thus, the American

nationalist movement would always be derived from or haunted by, to use Carlson's phrase, their historical connections to Britain.

It is by examining this British presence in American nationalism and applying the framework of ghosting that we can begin to unpack the significance of the Boston incident. As Erikson rightfully calls our attention to the presupposition that nationalism, like all definitional arguments, depends on negative relationships. A "unique style of civilization," American national identity was forged from its contrary relationship with the British. These relationships are often expressed syntactically through the us-them dichotomy, "us" or the nation considered in opposition to "them" or other political bodies. Americans saw Kean's snub as indicative of British opinions writ large: "They were morbidly conscious that the British attitude towards them was one of condescension, that the British regarded them as boorish citizens of a fourth-rate nation" (FitzSimons 151). Haunted by feelings of inferior, Americans expressed their anxieties about their national identity by framing the British through a xenophobic lens.

The idea that the past creates and dictates present reality, moreover, is fundamentally a Gothic predicament. The Gothic as a literary mode, certainly in vogue during the ascent and descent of both Cooke and Kean, has been variously described by authors, readers, and scholars since Horace Walpole printed *Castle of Otranto* in 1764 and, while each of their definitions differ, they all agree that the Gothic focuses on history.⁹² Gothic texts often manifest this focus on the past through overlapping

⁹² Contemporary Gothic scholarship, as Fred Botting writes, has made it impossible "to speak of 'the Gothic' with any assurance" (1). For more on defining the Gothic and the problems therein see Evans, *Gothic Drama from Shelley to Walpole* (1947), Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1986), Jeffery Cox, Introduction, *Seven Gothic Dramas* (1992), Williams, Introduction, *Art of Darkness* (1995) and Punter, *A Companion to the Gothic* (2000).

plotlines, flashbacks, and nesting narratives. These narrative strategies simulate the interconnectedness of time or the way history impacts present realities and future possibilities. Cox, for example, discusses this phenomenon in relation to Francis North's *The Kentish Barons* (1791). Cox describes Mortimer, the play's protagonist, through his relationship with time: "Turning from the future, he hopes to embrace present pleasure; but more importantly, his dismissal of the future leaves him ironically in the grip of the past" (27). The manifestation of the Gothic, according to Cox, involves the obsessive and ultimately recursive relationship to history expressed by characters' actions.

The characters themselves were derived from the particular paradox created through the conflation of the past and present inherent in the Gothic. To fit into this time-bending paradigm, the characters themselves needed to be paradoxical. Caught in a system where the past is present and the present is already past, these characters no longer have a stable definition to "right" and "wrong," "proper" and "improper." Such terms, after all, are grounded in a socio-historical moment, constructed through the ever-tenuous agreement of the here and now. Without the permanency of here and now, however, the characters of Gothic no longer are beholden to the established mores of society or so they wager. Those characters willing to take such risks are what scholars have referred to as the hero-villain.

And by the time of Kean's ascendance to the British stage, the hero-villain, rather than being a nascent character-type, was becoming a cultural phenomenon. As Cox has argued, the period between 1790s and the 1830s witnessed an increase in the number of hero-villains protagonists in popular drama who offered audiences a more relatable characterization than the traditional hero/villain types. These characters were based on

late eighteenth-century libertines, much like Kean himself (27). Kean performed several such parts, some of which he fought to bring to the stage, and was responsible for the popularity of this character type.⁹³ The hero-villain's vexed relationship with established systems of identity creation and legitimacy gave voice to a generation who witnessed social and political revolutions both at home and abroad.

But fighting between an uncertain future and an unforgiving past, the hero-villain, as his name suggests, disregards both to, as Cox reminds us, "embrace present pleasure." The present pleasure, usually a seduction or a revenge killing, is ephemeral. The moment after a virgin succumbs or a dagger plunged the hero-villain has gratified his present pleasure while simultaneously relinquishing any hope of a future. What he has left is the past, the moment his seduction was realized and his foe vanquished, and, having forfeit everything to the ephemeral pleasure, lives only to obsess over his former triumphs.

And Kean, a self-fashioned hero-villain, driven to the New York graveyard by his popular association with Cooke, discovered that like the Gothic hero-villain, his future as an actor was largely dictated by his past. In both Britain and America, Kean found himself in Cooke's shadow. Kean's contemporaries already formed their opinions about him long before meeting the actor: Cooke influenced Kean's relationships with his peers, such as Byron, as well as his reception by British and American public and presses. Although Kean attempted to deny his relationship with Cooke by claiming he never met the actor, Kean found himself retracing Cooke's trajectory as he battled alcohol addiction, bad press, hostile audiences, and even a transatlantic flight. Of course, as we

⁹³ Most notably, Kean played the popular hero-villain, Bertram, from Charles Robert Maturin's *Bertram, or The Castle of St Aldobrand* (1816).

have seen, Kean's repetition of Cooke's behavior did not end in the so-called land of opportunity. Like Cooke before him, Kean went looking for new opportunities only to find the same disappointments. It seemed that the more Kean denied his indebtedness to Cooke, the more he found himself cursed to repeat his failings. Trapped in this reiterative cycle, Kean goes to the graveyard not to plead for redemption but rather as gesture of acceptance. By disinterring Cooke and removing his finger as a reminder of the past's constant presence, Kean fulfills Cox's seeming prophecy by dismissing the future and embracing the past.

But Kean is a product of the social forces at work in both American and Britain at the end of the nineteenth century and, as such, suffers a fate analogous to those larger influences. Like Kean, Americans were frustrated by their perceived inferiority and continued reliance on their past. They found themselves stifled by their association with the British. They were "morbidly conscious" of the remnants of their British connection such as their reliance on British actors like Kean to populate their stages. By focusing on its history rather than its future, America was a haunted space of recursive identity performances. Kean's inability to make a new start in the reputed land of opportunity suggests that nineteenth-century America not transformative. Rather, America was a recursive space whose obsession with the past rendered it also a Gothic one.

3.5 (Re)covering History: Kean, Cooke, and a New Monument

While the Boston incident paints Kean as an ambassador of British pretentiousness, it also functioned to motivate Kean's exhumation of Cooke. Kean's ultimate disappointment with America and his inability to remake himself in this land of opportunity prompted the actor to face his own ghosts and to acknowledge his own

influences. On the day before Kean set off to England where, according to Kean's letter in the *National Advocate*, "every natural domestic tie, as well as the public love, await me on my own shores," he erected a monument to Cooke, which still stands today (qtd. in Hawkins 2:162). The monument reads: "Erected to the Memory of George Frederick Cooke 1756-1812 by Edmund Kean of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane 1821." Certainly, Kean can be accused of glorifying himself by prominently and publically displaying his name alongside Cooke's. Playfair summarizes Kean's motives thusly: "As an artist he was often compared with Cooke, and as a man he had superficially much in common with him. No wonder he protested passionately that Cooke was the greatest actor who had ever lived. And no wonder he longed for his memory to be respected. Subconsciously, he must have known that in honoring Cooke he was paying honour to himself" (211). However, we can also read this act in light of our discussion about their similarities as Kean's way of honoring Cooke's memory and acknowledging his own past.

Kean's choice of epitaph certainly supports a more beneficent reading of the actor's intentions. Drawing upon Cooke's somewhat ambiguous history and even more uncertain legacy, Kean's epitaph reads: "Three kingdoms proclaim his worth/Both hemispheres pronounce his worth." As we have already seen, Kean and Cooke were both haunted by their absent fathers and largely unknown origins. The fact, then, that Kean transforms these shared anxieties into a pronouncement of success, "three kingdoms proclaim his worth," demonstrates, yet again, the way the past influences—and often consumes—present realities. "Both hemispheres" refers to the eastern and western hemispheres, which in Kean's time referred to Britain and America, respectively, and

suggests that identity is as much defined by transatlantic relations as national ones.

Cooke's "worth," his reputation, is based on his transatlantic success, rather than either his British or American renown.

For Cooke and Kean, the threats and accusations of illegitimacy drove them from the stages of London to the shores of the New World, hoping that the waters of the Atlantic would wipe away their sullied reputations. Unlike other actors and actresses of their day, Cooke and Kean were bad boy celebrities who more interested in pushing the boundaries of propriety, walking the very limits of acceptability and occasionally, going over. They were jealous grudge-holders with quick tempers; they were alcoholics, womanizers, and murders, but they were also hailed as geniuses, revolutionaries, and risk-takers. For Cooke, the taint of illegitimacy would be inescapable and the ferocity of his isolation and exile from England would haunt not only his dying thoughts, but also those of another man he never met. Struggling with Cooke's legacy, Kean tried to bury the past, but when the past would not stay buried, he attempted to raise a new monument, to make amends with his ghosts, and to lay to rest the bones of a man who like himself won and lost fame in equal measure.

Ultimately, the invocation of these national and international identities illustrates how Kean and Cooke's ghostly relationship mimics the nationalist discourses occurring in both Britain and America. Both Cooke and Kean idealized America as a place of second chances, new opportunities, and personal re-creation but what they found was more Gothic than romantic. Their colonial past with Britain haunted Americans, and they struggled to define themselves beyond this history. Kean's exhumation of Cooke demonstrates the consequences of these Gothic obsessions with history for it was in the

graveyard where Kean learned all too well that America offered not re-creation, only reiteration, where the past is not buried but retold.

Epilogue: The Madwoman in the Wings: The Case of Mrs. Bunn

Illegitimacy, when applied to celebrity, becomes a powerful transgressive utterance: an angry threat against a celebrity's cultural authority; a formal declaration against the *status quo*; and a whispered insinuation about public and private desires. The connotation of the word appears largely negative, and its effects on a celebrity's reputation certainly bear witness to its damning influence. Yet the power of illegitimacy does not solely in its negativity. As we have seen, the guise of illegitimacy allowed individual performers to challenge established and accepted mores about gender, marriage, sexuality, class, age, ethnicity, nationality, and among many others. Of course, without celebrities challenging social codes, progress would be slow to come if it came all. While these performers suffered the negative consequences of living outside what was considered "legitimate," few of them changed their behavior to better accord with what would have been the easier and possibly more profitable life of legitimacy: Dorothy Jordan, despite attacks on her personage, lived with the Duke for over twenty years; William Henry West Betty profited handsomely while fending off accusations about his

body, gender, and sexuality; and Edmund Kean's desire to take risks made him one of the most respected performers to walk the London boards. Thus, the question now before us is not whether illegitimacy has negative or positive agency—for indeed, it has both—it is how does the agency of illegitimacy translate to some celebrities and fail to translate to certain celebrities? In the following case study, we will see how a celebrity fails to wield the power of illegitimacy and the consequences of denying illegitimacy its due.

On May 9, 1816, Margaret Agnes Somerville, hereafter referred to by her stage name, Bunn, was granted an opportunity of a professional lifetime. After a successful audition before a Drury Lane committee that included both Lord Byron and Douglas Kinnaird, the sixteen year-old actress was set to perform the lead female role in a new drama opposite none other than the infamous Edmund Kean. The young actress was to play the part of Imogene in *Bertram, or The Castle of St. Aldobrand* written by Charles Robert Maturin. The drama made use of popular gothic and melodramatic elements to tell the story of love and revenge, and its melodramatic moments and macabre subject matter played to both Kean's and Bunn's strengths as performers. The young actresses' supporters proclaimed that her "appearance on the stage will furnish the records of the Drama with a singular and memorable instance of the efforts and assiduity of a rare genius" (Fitzallen 54). The drama's rousing commercial success—it ran for twenty-two nights—was due in no small part to the young woman.⁹⁴

⁹⁴For some theatre critics, such as Genest, it was too successful: "it met with more success than it deserved—many parts of it are beautifully written but there is something very unpleasant in the characters of Bertram and Imogene" (8:533). Doran echoes Genest's sentiment almost exactly (2:374). Genest goes on to bemoan the "unprecedented price of 4s. and 6d, which was a scandalous imposition on the public" (8:533).

Bunn's portrayal of Imogene encouraged many critics to conjecture about her future place in the history of great actresses. Her tall, majestic stature and her debut in the heavy tragic line drew comparisons to the great Sarah Siddons, and many of her supporters hoped that Scotland would finally have their great female tragedian. From the *Memoirs of Miss Somerville*, the actress' memoirist, Allen Fitzallen, describes,

This lady, as the only tragic heroine born in Scotland, is risen, as it appears, to redeem the histrionic character of her country's stage. Mrs. Siddons has represented the English, Miss O'Neill the Irish, and Miss Somerville now comes forth the Melpomene of the Caledonian stage. (55)

As Imogene, Bunn was able to do something that few other debuting actresses could have done: she performed opposite an established leading man in a new drama and was not just able to hold her ground against the theatre titan, but actually turned a risky venture into a commercially and critically successful affair. Indeed, her success as Imogene was so "conspicuous" that Drury Lane offered her an engagement of three years, presented her with a list of several major roles, and promised her that she would perform opposite Kean himself.⁹⁵ With Imogene in her repertoire, Bunn seemed poised to take London by storm and secure her place in the theatrical annals.

But a quick glance through these theatrical annals reveals quite a different narrative. Rather than grace the headlining chapters of the theatre histories, Bunn's name is usually lumped in with "other," "minor," and "lesser," actresses in nineteenth-century histories, and in modern histories, is not even mentioned. The cause for her textual and historical absence was certainly not for lack of talent. She was highly praised as an

⁹⁵For more on the particulars of Drury Lane's dealings with Bunn, see *The Biography of the British Stage*, pgs. 25-28.

actress in the heavy line of tragedy including her roles as Imogene, Lady Macbeth, and Hermione. Despite having both recognized talent and commercial exposure, Bunn was still doomed to historic nonexistence. So, why has her name not echoed down to modern scholars along with her contemporaries like Charles Kemble, William Macready, and Edmund Kean?

As a field of critical inquiry, celebrity studies has almost single-mindedly focused on the factors that contribute to creating a celebrity despite the overwhelming amount of performers, both past and present, who fail to achieve celebrity status. In her overview of celebrity studies, Cheryl Wanko posits the following challenge to the field: “we need finally to ask the fundamental question of why celebrity most often fails to attach, both then and now, especially when it seems available to anyone” (359). As Wanko here suggests, the studies of these failed celebrities posit revolve around what we still do not know about the creation of celebrity. Are factors such as talent, exposure, reputation, and marketing that contribute to the creation of celebrity the same factors that contribute to another’s failure? Are they different? Do issues such as class, ethnicity, gender, or race determine a celebrity success or failure? Are these issues grounded in historical realities or can they be understood outside of their specific historical, social, and political context? What do performers like Bunn have to tell scholars about the circumstances that can produce both successful and unsuccessful celebrities? To answer these questions, we must focus on someone like Bunn where issues other than talent and exposure dictate an individual’s celebrity trajectory.

4.1 Madmen: Bunn's Leading Men

Bunn's success as Imogene garnered her enough public favor for the popular presses to extol her acting virtues and speculate on her future celebrity worth. The *Morning Post* "pronounces" the young actress' first appearance "the most promising we have ever witnessed: she surpassed all expectations that could be formed of her exertions; and has only to become a little more familiarised to the stage to obtain the highest rank of the profession in which she has thus embarked with such great and uncommon success" (qtd. in Fitzallen 9). The *Times* called her "a subject of great promise," and the *Morning Chronicle* asserts, "We certainly never witnessed a first attempt of so much merit" (qtd. in Fitzallen 9,10). On the heels of such a review, the actress was immediately signed to a lucrative contract with the most successful theatre in the Britain while still a teenager.

However, even this commercially and critically acclaimed performance was marred by controversy, suspicion, and accusations focused on what some viewed as the tense relationship between the overbearing and tyrannical leading man and his *ingénue* leading lady. According to spectators, Kean tried to use the young actress' staging naïveté to spoil her debut into London theatrical society. Several critics describe how "Kean, in his scenes with her, kept himself a little behind her, and did not give her fair play" (Genest 8:533). The importance of staging here cannot be overemphasized for as the Irish playwright and Bunn contemporary, John O'Keeffe, explains, "It is a method with an old stager, who knows the advantageous points of his art, to stand back out of the level with the actor who is on with him, and thus he displays his own full figure and face to the audience" (329). Kean's craftiness, however, did not compel critics to disparage Bunn's performance nor did it force them to focus solely on him. So, even if Kean was

attempting to upstage the young actress—and certainly, he was more than capable of such professional malice—he was ultimately unsuccessful.

Despite such rumors, Bunn and Kean continued to perform as the star-crossed Imogene and Bertram as well another tragic duo to popular acclaim. After Imogene, the managers quickly slated Bunn to play Imoinda in the revival of Southerne's *Tragedy of Oroonoko*. Again, the starlet acted alongside Kean to rave reviews, and the play was performed nine times—a romping success by nineteenth-century standards (Genest 8:588). With two commercially and critically successful plays, the duo appeared unstoppable, and their third play together, *Manuel*, should have cemented their power-couple status. *Manuel*, another gothic tragedy, was by the same author that had penned the wildly successful *Bertram*. Bunn would again play the wronged gothic heroine, Victoria, to another one of Kean's indomitable hero-villains, which by this time had become his trademark. *Manuel*, however, was no *Bertram*, and this ill-fated play was as panned by critics as *Bertram* had been applauded. It was only acted five times before it was pulled from production (Genest 8:590), and it was a major setback to Bunn's growing reputation. Like Victoria by play's end, Bunn's career at Drury Lane was dead.

After the *Manual* flop, Bunn mysteriously found herself *personae non gratae* around Drury Lane, and many of her many of her “friends” continued their voice their suspicions of Kean's role in her exile. The Drury Lane committee signed Bunn on for three years, offered her leading roles, and a liberal contract, but it was whispered that Kean refused to perform with her. He was said to have confessed her “too big and

overtowering a woman for his figure.”⁹⁶ Kean’s insinuation that it was Bunn’s grotesquely large body—and not his own prohibitively short one—doomed the rising star to perform only certain characters that Kean deemed fit for her stature.⁹⁷ Fitzallen states the issue even more bluntly:

To be brief, Miss Somerville has a very fine figure, and the gentleman in question has not; and he therefore objected to perform any more in the same piece with her, at least where she had to sustain a principal part. That he should have such prejudice is not so unnatural, as that the Managers of a Metropolitan Theatre should allow him to exercise it. (15)

The performance history does appear to support Fitzallen’s claims. After their success with *Bertram*, records have Mrs. Bunn performing opposite Kean only twice more: on January 20, 1817 in the revival of *Tragedy of Oroonoko*, and again on March 8, 1817 in the detested *Manuel* (8:588, 590). With the headlining actor’s refusal to perform alongside his new leading lady, the Melpomene of the Caledonian stage found herself a veritable exile at the theatre. In the winter of 1817, less than a year into her contract, Bunn left Drury Lane for the provincial circuit.

While Kean’s rivalries with his fellow actors fueled his bad boy reputation and gave his illegitimate celebrity the air of legitimacy, his rivalry with Bunn did not bolster

⁹⁶This quote comes from Simpson and Braun, pg. 300. Kean’s concerns about his height in relationship to Bunn have been noted in the following places: Archer, 45; *DNB*, pg. 270; Kahan, pg. 35; Oxberry, 168-169.

⁹⁷It is important to note that Bunn’s height was largely seen as a desirable quality for a tragic actress. Comparing Bunn to one of her contemporaries, a writer from the *European Magazine and London Review* remarks: “in person, however, [Mrs. Bunn and Mrs. West] widely differ, and for the tragic muse the taller and more majestic stature of Mrs. Bunn, is much more adapted than the smaller figure and prettier face of Mrs. West (556).

her reputation in the theatrical community. In fact, Kean's rivalry with such a young female performer could have been a devastating blow to Bunn's budding career. While audiences paid to see Kean and Cooke and their male contemporaries fight their narcissistic battles on stage, the same does not appear to be true of male-female rivalries, especially ones involving an *ingénue* and an established male celebrity. Kean and Cooke could use their roles as villains to battle with the domineering Kemble while simultaneously building their reputations as bad boy types. Bunn, however, lacked both the agency and autonomy to use her sympathetic position as Kean's victim to market herself to the public. Perhaps with more marketing savvy, she could have successfully played Kean's injured gothic heroine both onstage and off. Instead, Bunn found herself more like Bertram and Manual: she was relegated to the position of exile, outcast, and drifter by a society that deemed her (and her body) illegitimate. Of course, in a kind of karmic turn around, Kean would find himself an exile himself from this very theatrical community not four years later only to eventually have a rousing London homecoming after a short tour in America. By contrast, Bunn's eventual return to London would not be such a triumphant return, but rather, a bitter struggle to recapture the position she had inexplicable lost.

Kean's professional jealousy certainly curtailed the aspiring actress' rising star, and Bunn's supporters found a probable villain on which to blame her inability to gain lasting traction with London audiences. But could one man be the sole reason for Mrs. Bunn's failed celebrity? While Kean's rivalry with Bunn certainly damaged her initial rise to celebrity, many of her critics and biographers blamed the other leading man in her life. In the provinces, the young actress met the man who would eventually become her

husband and who many felt was responsible for damaging her reputation in the theatrical community beyond repair. This man, Alfred Bunn, stage-manager at Drury Lane, Birmingham, and Covent Garden, was known as an irascible tyrant under whom few actors wanted to work.⁹⁸ William Charles Macready famously beat him in his own office after suffering under his managerial despotism.⁹⁹ While Jenny Lind, the famous “Swedish Nightingale,” decided to face both legal and social controversy just to break her contract with him.¹⁰⁰ In addition to his legendary fights with the period’s most famous actors and actresses, Bunn gained something of a celebrity status for translating and introducing opera to the English stage.

Alfred Bunn’s reputation as something of a hotheaded tyrant effected his wife’s reputation both with the other actors and the public. Macready held a contemptuous opinion of his hated manager’s wife and wrote derisively about her in his “reminiscences.” While William Hazlitt was busying comparing the newly minted Mrs. Bunn’s voice to “deep murmur of a hive of bees in springtide, and the words drop like honey from her lips,” Macready says that her Lady Macbeth “could awaken little hope of

⁹⁸Bunn was made the stage-manager of Drury Lane in 1823, and then the Birmingham Theatre in 1826. In 1833, he undertook joint responsibilities at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. In 1840, Bunn declared bankruptcy, but managed to continue on as the manager of Drury Lane until his retirement from management in 1848 at the age of fifty-two.

⁹⁹In Macready’s own words, he walked passed Bunn’s door and “going up to him as he sat on the other side of the table, I struck him as he rose a backhanded slap across the face. I did not hear what he said, but I dug my fist into him as effectively as I could; he caught hold of me, and got at one time the little finger of my left hand in his mouth, and bit it” (*The Diaries*, 380).

¹⁰⁰According to Lind biographers, Holland and Rockstro, the singer “was so terrified at the penalties, the law-suits, and the disgrace with which Mr. Bunn had threatened her, that her dearest and most trusted friends could not persuade her to entertain the idea of appearing at an English theatre, under any circumstances, or upon any terms whatever” (1:429). The controversy was recorded by Bunn in his *The Case of Bunn Versus Lind*.

very rapturous applause” (166; 1:191). Actors with personal vendettas were not the only ones to disparage Bunn because of her marriage. The public, too, seemed to be conflicted by her marital choice. Theatre historians Harold Simpson and Mrs. Braun describe how “This marriage was an unfortunate one and led to some scandal, her popularity under her married name bring less pronounced than hitherto” (301). The transference of dislike from husband to wife hampered Bunn, critics argued, from attaining anything more than a passing notoriety. Yet, even after her marriage to Alfred in 1819, she continued to be a successful actress for at least the next six years. Alfred Bunn’s public and theatrical reputation certainly exposed his wife to ridicule, but despite her husband’s reputation, audiences, critics, and even her fellow actors continued to be enchanted by her deep voice and heavy pathos.

While Bunn’s marriage to Alfred may not have had the damning effect that some claimed, it did instigate a scandal that would transform Bunn from the victimized *ingénue* into the criminal *femme fatale*. While the records concerning this part of Bunn’s life are rather sparse, we do know that either in an attempt to rid herself of Alfred or of Alfred to rid himself of her, Bunn had taken up with the notorious rake Colonel William Berkeley, the eldest son of Frederick Berkeley, 5th Earl of Berkeley.¹⁰¹ The question surrounding this affair is not a matter of if but rather a matter of when and how. John Wilson, in his formidable series *Noctes Ambrosianae*, wrote the most succinct account about the affair in March 1825 edition of *Blackwood’s Magazine*. In his footnote, Wilson refers to a “sad

¹⁰¹ There is some question as to whether or not his mother, Mary Cole, was legitimately married to the Earl at the time of his birth. This matter was discussed before a special committee of the House of Lords, and his legitimacy confirmed. Despite confirmation by the House, however, many continued to suspect him as he did not inherit the Earldom upon his father’s death in 1810.

and scandalous transaction of the time” involving Berkeley and Maria Foote, the daughter of theatrical Samuel Foote (57n). Wilson recounts how Berkeley found his young amour’s “virtue strong” and thus “turned to her parents, and is generally believe to have paid a large sum of money for their complicity in his seduction of his daughter!” (57n). This affair was largely believed to have started in 1816, and Foote would go on to bare two of his children. This arrangement, however, was ended in 1825 when another man propose to mother of two, and she accepted on Berkeley’s advisement because by this time, Bunn had become “occupant of his domicile” (58n).

The details of the Berkeley-Bunn arrangement show a strikingly similar narrative pattern to the Berkeley-Foote one. According to the satirical print, *Buy a Bun!* (1825) by Isaac Cruikshank, Alfred arranged for the seduction of his wife in exchange for an annuity. (Figure 4.1) The print displays a man, Berkeley, in full hunting regalia including riding boots and crop with a note reading “Vagrant Act”—an allusion to an English act, which prohibited idleness—sticking out of his jacket pocket. Despite his hunting attire, it is not wild game he is after, but rather the “buns” of the pretty lady standing by the roadside. The lady, Bunn, smiles coyly as Berkeley literally stuffs his mouth with her buns.

Besides the obvious sexual pun on “buns,” Cruikshank makes an argument about how actresses in general, and Bunn in particular, may be visually, physically, and sexually consumed for the right price. The satirical print recalls the same language used by caricaturists who referred to the sale price for “use of the public jordan.” Despite already having his bun, Berkeley asks, “What’s the price my pretty Dear?” to which the



Figure 4.1 *Buy a Bun!* by Isaac Cruikshank. British Museum.

lady offers: “Only one half penny to you Kind Sir—Taste & try before you Buy.” The repartee here alludes both to the ongoing nature of the affair, “taste and try before you buy,” as well as to the economical quid pro quo, “one half penny.” The price, of course, is exceedingly low, which suggests Cruikshank is making a point about the goods for sale. The sales pitch, however, seems to work since Berkeley exclaims: “Upon my honour it is delicious. Oh! ye Gods! I must have another taste.” Another insinuation of the ongoing affair is alluded to by the sign behind Bunn pointing “to Berkely [sic] Square” and another “To Bunhill Row.” Both signs, of course, are pointed in the same direction indicating that both parties are heading to the same home.

Bunn’s “buns,” however, quickly stale, and by 1830, there is evidence to suggest that affair of convenience has lost its luster. Another satirical print entitled *The Devil reproving Sin* (1830) by John Phillips illustrates the distance between the former lovers. (Figure 4.2) The scene takes place back stage and features four persons in what appears to be something of a love quarrel. To the far, a young couple, Lady Lennox and Joseph Wood, are seen in an intimate embrace while a man in a top hat, Berkeley, attempts to dissuade the young man’s advances by saying, “My dear fellow be prudent—consider how the lady’s character will suffer by your protection.” The appeal, of course, is tongue-and-cheek as Berkeley himself is attempting woo the young lady. Just over Berkeley’s shoulder is the woman’s unfortunate husband, Lord Lennox, who impotently attempts to stop both men from seducing his wife. Two women who appear in the background angrily observe the entire scene. The lady in pink, Bunn, pleads with the old



Figure 4.2 *The Devil reproving Sin* by John Phillips. British Museum.

woman, “Oh, mother did you hear what the Colonel said” to which the old woman soothingly replies: “Hoot away, hoot away Marget—dinna make a fool o yourself—where would you git a’ your finery without him?” Bunn’s mother reminds her daughter that despite his roguish ways, she is still financially dependent on him.

Bunn, of course, was not the first actress to suffer on account of her liaisons. As we have already seen, much of the controversy surrounding Dorothy Jordan was on account of her relationship with the Duke of Clarence. The initial outcry over the Jordan-Duke affair had as much to do with the public's corrupted image of the "natural" actress as it did with the what critics framed the moral and ethical degeneration of the royal family and institution of marriage itself. In addition to the questions the affair posed about the institutions of monarchy and marriage, Jordan's celebrity also suffered from the Duke's reputation as an awkward, ineffectual, though mostly innocuous member of the royal family garner Jordan some public scorn. With her association with the Duke and her transformation into the "public jordan," the once well-regarded actress suffered from a tarnished public reputation. Like Jordan, the public largely transferred their feelings about Bunn's lover onto the actress herself. The result was an irreconcilable rift between her public image as Kean's benighted victim and the wife of the hated, tyrannical Alfred Bunn and the mistress of the rakish Berkeley.

Certainly, all of Bunn's leading men are equally to blame for creating a harsh and antagonistic environment for Bunn's budding celebrity and all contributed in some way her tarnished public reputation. Yet despite being let down by all of her leading men, Bunn's performance history tells a different story than the sad tale of the slighted woman. Kean's refusal to perform with the actress pushed her to the provincial acting circuit where she found fame, success, and adoration. Without Kean's jealousy, Bunn, was able to reinvent herself, create new characters, and attract the attention, if not the admiration, of the theatre establishment. Marrying Alfred was detrimental to her reputation but not damning. After their her marriage in 1819, she continued to be a successful actress for at

least the next six years. Similarly, her scandalous affair with Berkeley did not stop her from creating, shaping, and performing her most beloved characters. Thus, despite Bunn's these rather negative influences, her failed celebrity appears only to be partially, rather than completely, the result of the interference of her leading men. In order to complete the portrait of Mrs. Bunn's failed celebrity, we need to look at other factors that contributed to her ultimate unsuccessful attempt at fame.

4.2 Madwomen: Mrs. Bunn's Female Rivals

Quick to blame her failed celebrity on the tyrannical Kean, the hotheaded Alfred Bunn, or the rakish Berkeley, critics have overlooked other possible culprits for the actress' forgettable impression. For while Bunn's leading men certainly tainted her popular reputation either by purposely or allusively undermining her stardom, the actress herself was busy waging her own professional wars. Her performance history offers a story of female-female rivalry, and the risks actresses were willing to take in pursuit of celebrity. While in exile from Drury Lane, Bunn found substantial success at Bath where she could perform and perfect roles that would become the signature of her repertoire including Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Hermione in *A Winter's Tale*, and most importantly, Bianca in H. H. Milman's debut play, *Fazio*. Bunn's portrayal of the mad Bianca in Milman's *Fazio* was certainly reminiscent to her first triumph as Imogene, and provincial audiences flocked to see her as the depraved madwoman. With Bunn once again playing the gothic heroine, *Fazio* proved to be quite a sensation in the provinces, and the exiled actress was once again poised to take London by storm.

With more experience, an expanded repertoire, and yet another commercially successful character, Bunn returned to London, this time to Covent Garden where the

jealous Kean could not exert his political influence. Of course, the only problem with her reinvention was a woman named Elizabeth O'Neill who was already performing the part of Bianca at Covent Garden. For her comeback to be successful, she would have to displace the actress who was already her chief female rival and an established performer in the London theatrical world. In her rivalry with O'Neill, Bunn had something of an advantage having "created" the character of Bianca in the play's initial run in Bath. Audiences at Bath had raved not just about the play but also about Bunn's Bianca, specifically so that "when [Mrs. Bunn] played it at Covent Garden her performance of it was preferred to that of Miss O'Neill, who had already played it there" (Simpson and Braun 300). While O'Neill may have had the headliner's position at Covent Garden and was said to represent the Irish in the heavy tragedy, she was no match for the Melpomene of the Caledonian stage.

According to the press, the comparison between these two actresses was foremost on the British theatergoing public's mind. The *Morning Post* recalls how the young actress showed some remarkable "courage" in her challenge to O'Neill:

To attempt on these boards a character in which the public had so recently witnessed the transcendent excellence of Miss O'Neill, was an effort of much courage; for though the example might excite emulation, the fear of comparison much greatly intimidate. The result, however, added a fresh proof to the truth of adage; that fortune crowns the enterprising Miss Somerville's success last night must have surpassed even her brightest dreams of hope. Never has an audience bestowed ampler marks of its approbation, and seldom have these gratifying plaudits been more justly deserved. (qtd. in Fitzallen 48)

Like the *Morning Post*, the writers for the *Morning Herald* agreed that the young actress had won the challenge and taken the tragic laurels from O'Neill's head: "If in the tenderness, the playfulness of the opening scenes, she was inferior to Miss O'Neill, it is but justice to Miss to add, that in several passages she was decidedly superior for originality of conception and happiness of execution" (qtd. in Fitzallen 51). Bunn's challenge to O'Neill's tenure as the headlining actress, however, was not to end with the role of Bianca. Indeed, the stage was set for a rivalry that would set the presses running.

The simmering animosity between the two actresses was set to boil over when less than a month later it was announced that Bunn was to play Alicia to O'Neill's Jane Shore in the tragedy of the same name. The similarity of their acting styles combined with the displacement of O'Neill in favor of Bunn for the role of Bianca stirred the public's imagination about a presumed showdown between "a nation's idol" (Baron-Wilson 33) and the Melpomene of the Caledonian stage. According to the *Times*, "Public expectation had, indeed, been fixed for some days past on this representation, and the announcement that the two great female ornaments of tragedy, Miss O'Neill and Miss Somerville, were to appear in the same play; and every seat in the house was consequently occupied before the rising curtain" (qtd. in Fitzallen 52). The stage was literally set for a showdown between the two leading ladies.

The two women performed in *Jane Shore* to a packed Covent Garden house on November 9, 1818.¹⁰² Following the first performance, a weekly theatrical paper began disparaging the performance of O'Neill while simultaneously aggrandizing that of Bunn. Far from the usual "puff" piece, the theatrical paper was set on doing damage to

¹⁰² According to Genest, the play was acted with this cast fourteen times (8:698). *The Theatrical Inquisitor* of January 1819 says eleven ("Memoirs of Miss Somerville," 327).

O'Neill's quite sterling reputation. It was quickly discovered that the author of the weekly paper was none other than Alfred Bunn. Macready, unsurprisingly, notes the entire controversy acrimoniously:

A weekly theatrical paper had been started in praise of Miss Somerville and in depreciation of Miss O'Neill, by a bookseller, Harris, whose shop in Bow Street was opposite to the theatre. It was very soon ascertained that Mr. Bunn had set it on foot, and was its sole editor. As the husband of Miss Somerville, he had been allowed the *entree* of the green-room; but on this discovery Mr. Fawcett, the stage-manager, upon the indignant representation of the performers, gave him to understand, with some very severe comments on the affair, that his presence in the green-room was disagreeable to the ladies and gentlemen who frequented it, and could no longer be permitted. Upon which Mr. Bunn very penitently promised to stop the publication of the abusive journal, and his strictures on the performances were for a time discontinued. The paper after three or four numbers was heard of no more. (Macready 1:174-175)

Rather than sully the established and well-earned reputation of O'Neill, Alfred Bunn's theatrical paper only served to further tarnish his future wife's reputation. For despite Alfred's involvement in the scandal, it was her name that was passed about in theatrical and social circles alongside that of O'Neill. *The Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror* of January 1819 makes a comment in relationship to this event. Under the heading "Notices to Correspondents," the editor chastises the correspondent "who has favoured us with a communication respecting the alledged [sic] fracas between Miss Somerville and Miss O'Neill, is informed, that we do not think it decorous to insert any

article on such a subject, that is not authenticated” (*Theatrical Inquisitor*, January 1819).

The public preferred to think of the rivalry between these combating female tragedians, and Bunn continued to be the face of the scandal even if she was not the author of it. Of course, that is not to say that Bunn was not an instigator in her rivalry with O’Neill.

While we have no evidence of her involvement with the newspaper, it would not be too presumptuous to suppose that even if she did not actively contribute to the disparagement of her rival, she was at least aware of it, especially in light of her rivalries with other actresses.

After the O’Neill rivalry reached something of a crescendo with the performance of *Jane Shore*, Bunn slipped into a relatively quiet period in her short, but tumultuous career. From 1818 to 1823, she performed mostly at Covent Garden and at Bath and received accolades for her Queen Elizabeth in the stage adaptation of Sir Walter Scott’s *Kenilworth*, a part “in which she was applauded to the very echo” (*Biography of the British Stage*, 28). The relative peace and success, which Bunn’s had finally found, however, changed in 1823 when her husband was made the stage-manager of Drury Lane. Bunn and her husband were back in the spotlight when on October 27, 1823 she performed her acclaimed Bianca in *Fazio* at Drury Lane, her first appointment at the theatre in six years (9:228). With her husband’s new position and recapturing of her former place, the actress was now in position, much as Kean had been, to dictate some personnel decisions. The most apparent target of her newfound power was a potential rival by the name of Mrs. Harriet Waylett.

Like her rivalry with O’Neill, much of Bunn’s antagonistic relationship with this actress appears to have been based on professional jealousy, but unlike her rivalry with

O'Neill, Bunn's critics also alleged a personal motive behind Mrs. Bunn's dislike of the up-and-coming actress. In both person and talent, Waylett was a formidable rival. As a performer, she was known chiefly as a soubrette, "in which line of acting she is a powerful rival to any actress on the British stage" ("Mrs. Waylett," 242), and as a ballad singer. In this latter line of work, she was often compared to famous Lucia Elizabeth Vestris, or Madame Vestris, the great English opera singer.¹⁰³ Her performing abilities, according to contemporary commentators, were enhanced by her "A face handsome, full of expression, and capable of conveying very strong effect—an excellent figure, —and a most engaging general appearance" ("Mrs. Waylett," 242), and "when habited in male attire, is considered, by the connoisseurs in ladies' legs, almost able to compete with Madame Vestris" ("Memoir of Mrs. Waylett," 98). Given her formidable repertoire and her equally formidably stature, it was no wonder why the public thought that there might be something unsavory happening between the beautiful starlet and her overly attached manager.

Alfred Bunn, and presumably his wife, first met Waylett when she worked under his management at Birmingham. Waylett was performing in the Birmingham Theatre when the all-too-familiar news of a scandal erupted: a theatrical newspaper was publishing puff pieces about the headlining actresses to the disparagement of her rivals. Waylett's biographers recount, "The sustained and excessive eulogies which had been bestowed on her in the 'Theatrical Looker-On,' a Birmingham paper, the ownership of which the Birmingham public insisted on ascribing to Bunn, had given rise to a crop of scandals and to threats on his part of persecutions for libel" (*DNB* 20:995). Such a

¹⁰³Vestris was an actress and opera singer who was largely regarded as the principle singer of her day.

scandal would have seemed all-too-familiar to Bunn who was the recipient of such amorous affections during her previous rivalry with O'Neill. Of course, instead of being the recipient, this time Bunn watched as the young actress entertained the accolades that her husband had once bestowed on her.

To add insult to injury, it was now the general consensus that her husband was openly making advances to another woman. The insinuations, whether true or not, painted her as something of a fool in the public eye—not to mention what such a rumor did to Waylett's reputation. The newspaper scandal rippled through the theatrical community and the implication of the situation reached a boiling point. Dramatic historians Simpson and Braun recount the entire affair thusly: "In 1823 she was acting in Birmingham under Alfred Bunn, who was supposed to have a weakness for her; on account of some printed insinuations in connection with this, she forced the parties concerned to acknowledge the falsehood of the charges in a letter, and received from them £50 for her 'benefit'" (310). Instead of putting an end to the Waylett-Bunn association, the scandal in Birmingham only forced the now threesome to change locations, and in 1824, they came to Drury Lane. Bunn, having already been made a fool in Birmingham, was not about to see her personal and professional rival triumph on the same boards she had found success years earlier. So, even though the versatile Waylett was quite the acquisition for the company, Bunn saw to it that her appearances were few.¹⁰⁴ Far from the rising starlet of her debut, Bunn had eventually garnered a reputation more for her rivalries than her talent.

¹⁰⁴Simpson and Braun's account gives Bunn's jealousy as the primary reason for Waylett disuse by the Drury Lane managers (311). The *DNB* corroborates Simpson and Braun saying, "Her appearances must,

Bunn's inability to control her public image especially in light of her female rivalries also points to another possible reason for her ultimate failed celebrity. Scholars of celebrity studies such as Laura Engel, Jeffery Kahan, Felicity Nussbaum, Cheryl Wanko, and others, have suggested that an individual's marketing and communications savvy is one of the primary markers of a celebrity's success.¹⁰⁵ A celebrity's ability to "fashion" their public image, to borrow a term from Engel, allows them to sell a certain image of themselves to the public.¹⁰⁶ For instance, Kahan has demonstrated how William Henry West Betty and his "friends" manipulated the emerging market for celebrity memorabilia and used that market as a vehicle for his own public image.¹⁰⁷ The young actor capitalized on what critics viewed as his ambiguous gender identity through portraits, etchings, commemorative coins, and figurines, and transformed his seemingly illegitimate attraction into financial and commercial success. Like Betty, Kean, too, used the popular press to manipulate his bad boy reputation and create a legitimate reputation for himself out of what had previously destroyed the careers of actors like George Frederick Cooke. Of course, not all celebrities have the mass marketing vehicle to spread their controlled and manipulated public image. Dorothy Jordan, for instance, had little control over the caricatures that came to symbolize her in the wake of her scandalous affair with the Duke. In Jordan's case, however, the actress was able to relinquish control

however, have been few perhaps on account of the rivalry and jealousy of Mrs. Bunn, and she is no further traced at Drury Lane" (60:84).

¹⁰⁵ See Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity*, esp. Introduction; Kahn, *Bettymania*, esp. "Betty Conquers London"; Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, esp. Introduction; and Wanko, "Celebrity Studies," esp. pgs. 151-153.

¹⁰⁶ See Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity*, esp. Introduction.

¹⁰⁷ See Kahan, *Bettymania*, esp. "Desiring and Tiring of Master Betty."

over her public image and by not engaging with the purveyors of popular media, she managed to succeed despite being labeled as an illegitimate consort of the royal son.

But not all celebrities have the communications and marketing savvy of Betty, Kean, and Jordan. Bunn lacked the control that Betty and Kean exercised over their public images, and rather than relinquish control over her public image like Jordan, she continued to engage in public skirmishes with her fellow actors and actresses, which contributed to her reputation as a jealous and vindictive woman. What little control Bunn did relinquish control over her public image, she surrendered to her husband who overtly abused it in his own pursuit for power, wealth, and celebrity. Without such communications savvy, wannabe celebrities figures like Bunn fail to attain and maintain the necessary relationship with the public to ensure a lasting reputation

When coupled with her questionable associations with Kean, Alfred and Berkeley, Bunn's relationships with her female rivals also placed her at a decided disadvantage. After her exile by Kean, her questionable marriage to Alfred, and her scandalous arrangement with Berkeley, the actress was certainly portrayed by theatre historians as a naïve victim of these leading men, a portrayal almost certainly reinforced by her performance of gothic heroines like Imogene. After her rivalries with these two women, however, it would have been difficult to see her as anything other than a jilted, jealous woman bent on revenge. She used her position of power within the same managerial system that had once exiled and silenced her to exile and silence other women.

Such female-female rivalries not only would have informed audience's perception about a specific celebrity but they help to demonstrated the complex world of female

celebrity creation. Studying female rivalries on the London stage and their effects on celebrity, Felicity Nussbaum's provocative study, *Rival Queens*, provides some context for understanding the ways female-female rivalries were often used by actresses as an avenue for marketing and self-commodification. While Nussbaum examines rivalries that largely took place in the mid-eighteenth century, her analysis of female-female relationships on the stage suggests that rivalries on the stage can function as a unique marketing tool:

Played out across the century, the quarreling women revealed its tensions within their real and simulated subjectivities, and they challenged audiences, including the men who were seduced by them and the women who secretly sought to emulate them, to discriminate between the opposing values they represented. In fulfilling the audience's abstract desires, the paired actresses furthered their careers and promoted their self-commodification into the cult of celebrated individuality as they repeated their battles afresh (91).

Bunn's rivalries with O'Neill and Waylett certainly did receive some of the benefits that attend this type of marketing strategy in the form of attendance receipts, but her failure to cash-in on the long term benefits of high-profile rivalries demonstrates that such marketing can just as easily backfire on one or both of the actresses in question. Bunn was largely viewed as the aggressor in these rivalries and as a result, took the brunt of the negative publicity surrounding these events.

The effect of these rivalries on Bunn's celebrity is really an issue of the actress's inability to mediate between her position on stage and her reputation off. Bunn's failure to mediate between her rivalries in performance and her rivalries in real life tainted her

reputation with the public while simultaneous bolstering sympathy for O'Neill and Waylett. Her obvious villainy did not necessarily offer an "opposing value" to that of either O'Neill or Waylett. Instead, the clear one-sided nature of these rivalries resulted in her being regarded by the public as a jealous, scheming, and unlikeable woman while O'Neill and Waylett were portrayed as her more talented, amiable counterparts. Her inability to translate these rivalries into meaningful and marketable vehicles for her celebrity suggests that female-female rivalries, even when they are fiscally successful, are also a real, tangible threat to the creating and attaining celebrity.

Despite sparring with O'Neill and silencing Waylett, Bunn still could not and did not triumph over her professional and personal rivals. After the Waylett scandal, Bunn was rarely seen at Drury Lane in the 1825-1826 season, and after 1827, she was hardly seen at all. The dramatic histories have her effectively retiring by 1830, at the age of thirty-one. She seems to live the next fifty-three years away from the stage, dying at the age of eighty-three in early 1883 without as much as a mention.

4.3 Mad folk: Mrs. Bunn's Alternate Identities

While rivalries, questionable liaisons, and failed marketing campaigns are certainly enough reasons as to why Bunn ultimately failed to realize the potential critics saw in her debut performances, there are other possible factors that could have contributed to Bunn's failed celebrity. Her poor personal and professional decisions contributed to her reputation as a jealous and tyrannical woman whose lives on and off stage were full of turmoil, struggle, and frustration punctuated by flashes of genius, originality, and creativity. While these characteristics were certainly part and parcel of a performer's life, they are also the quintessential traits of Bunn's most infamous and

beloved theatrical characters. The fact that she was known to have the same kind of personal and professional turmoil as her characters not only gave the actress a keen insight into Imogene's turmoil, Bianca's struggle, and Lady Macbeth's frustration, but they also reinforced the same qualities in the actress herself. The transference between character and performer would have been too noticeable for audiences to consciously or unconsciously refute. Haunted by her most beloved roles, Bunn's alternative identities would have further painted her as the perfect portrait of madness and illegitimacy.

The specter of the madness that would haunt Bunn's theatrical career entered, appropriately enough, at her London debut. In her critically and commercially successful debut as Imogene, Bunn's initial impression on the public would have been an image of personal turmoil wrapped in the cloak of dejection and madness. The plot of the gothic drama follows the structure of a revenge tragedy. Bertram, the character played by Kean in the debut, is an exiled noble turned criminal, who coincidentally lands on the island of St. Aldobrand, Bertram's political rival. Unbeknownst to Bertram, St. Aldobrand has married his former paramour, Imogene, played by Bunn, who consented to the marriage on the dying wish of her father. After seducing Imogene and murdering St. Aldobrand, Bertram is forced to watch as his beloved, now insane, wander through the wood talking about her murdered husband and her now-drowned child before dying in his arms. As Imogene, the young actress garnered praise for her emotionally wrought portrayal of the madwoman or what the British Press specifically referred to as her "considerable degree of feeling" (qtd. in Fitzallen 10). Imogene, however, was only the first madwoman to haunt Bunn's repertoire.

It is unsurprising that Bunn's greatest dramatic success following Imogene was the role of another madwoman, Bianca from Milman's *Fazio*. *Fazio* revolves around the titular character and his wife, Bianca. After years of failure, Fazio, a self-proclaimed alchemist, steals the fortune of his dead neighbor and passes his newfound riches off as evidence of alchemy. His beloved wife, Bianca, soon discovers that the money has changed her husband from a kind, caring scientist into a selfish, adulterous tyrant. Upon discovering his infidelity, Bianca reports Fazio as a fraud, and he is quickly sentenced to death. Upon hearing this sentence, Bianca becomes wild, thinking that Fazio's new-found-wealth would simply be confiscated and that they could return to their previous domestic bliss. Fazio is executed, and in the final moments of the play, Bianca descends into madness, and dies.

In Bunn's performance history, Bianca is significant for two reasons. First, Bianca represents the actress' first major success after her debut as Imogene. After her exile to Bath following the Kean rivalry, Bianca offered Bunn a vehicle for re-introducing herself to the London theatres and London audiences, making this character just as important, if not more so, than her debut Imogene. Second, Bunn's success as Bianca reinforces her reputation as a performer of madwomen and further contributes to a connection between her and these character types in the popular imagination. As the "creator" of both Bianca and Imogene, Bunn's reputation formed an association with the character, and it would be this association that the dramatic histories would consistently call upon whenever they were trying to rationalize the actress' inclusion in their "minor," "lesser," and "other" histories.

The idea that Bunn is connected to “other” histories in dramatic circles not only speaks to her failure as a celebrity, but also suggests that she herself can be seen through the lens of “other.” Just as her rivalries on stage influenced the general perception of her onstage, her critical and commercially successful characters Bunn also tintured her reputation. The transference between performance and real life haunted the actress’ relationship with her audiences much in the same way her madwomen were haunted by their relationships with the other characters.

Like William Henry West Betty, it is altogether possible that Bunn was the victim of typecasting, which ultimately limited her to certain parts and certain plays. Her professional strength, as her performance and critical history demonstrates, is the madwoman-type in the “heavy line” of tragedy. If such typecasting was not detrimental enough to her aspiration, then the parts and plays most suited to her skills, those that Jeffery Cox would categorize as “gothic” dramas, were quickly disappearing from the stage. In his groundbreaking study on gothic dramas, Cox outlines the popularity for such dramas between 1789-1825. Cox’s timeline is particularly compelling when applied to Bunn’s performance history as both *Bertram* and *Fazio* are two important plays within this history.¹⁰⁸ The final year, 1825, marks a noticeable decline in Bunn’s performances as Simpson and Braun record: “She was not much heard of after 1825, and died early in 1883” (301). Certainly, Bunn’s veritable disappearance from the stage and the disappearance of gothic drama could be little more than coincidence, but the

¹⁰⁸ Genest records seven entries for Mrs. Bunn in 1825: January 28: Amelia in *Othello*; February 17: Olympia in *Masaniello*; February 24: Tullia in *Brutus*; May 11: Emma Tell in *William Tell*; June 2: Princess Katharine in *Henry V*; and June 29: Mrs. Oakly in *The Jealous Wife* (9: 289, 290, 292, 293, 296, 297).

disappearance of this once promising actress around the same time as these widely popular plays seems more deliberate than coincidental. Through both *Imagine* and *Bianca*, Bunn had become the public face of a dying line of tragedy, and as these fashionable plays became faded into obscurity, it is not hard to imagine that so too did their heroine.

The study of Bunn's failed celebrity offers a unique insight into the ways that illegitimate personal and professional relationships and the perception of those relationships by the public influence the creation, destruction, or failure of celebrity as much or perhaps more than potential or talent. While this brief study does not account for all possible factors that can determine a celebrity's success or failure, it does isolate some potential areas that influence a celebrity's ultimate potential. Just as the creation of a celebrity figure is said to be contingent on the successful union of social, historical, and political conditions, the failure of a wannabe celebrity figure is likewise contingent on the unsuccessful union of those same conditions. In other words, the failure of celebrity to attach to an individual figure is not and cannot be determined by a single factor.

Rather, the history of failed celebrities is one wherein many conditions join together to prevent an individual from reaching celebrity status. These conditions may include, but are not limited to, the perception or performance of an individual's national, ethnic, gender, sexual, age, and/or class identity, all of which are historically determined and defined. The shifting ideas of these conditions in historical and social narratives and their equally changing status of normative and non-normative result in different definitions of what constitutes a failed celebrity over time. In the case of Bunn, her rivalries with her fellow actors and actresses, her marriage and social status, and her roles

and performances, all contributed to create a public persona that was haunted by scandal, jealousy, rivalry, madness, and illegitimacy.

4.4 Conclusion

The case studies of Dorothy Jordan, William Henry West Betty, Edmund Kean, and Margaret Agnes Bunn demonstrate how the public perception of illegitimacy influenced how a particular celebrity-object either succeeded or failed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Within the emerging celebrity consumer culture, performers manipulated images of themselves for the public and were in turn manipulated by the public who was eager to consume both tangible and intangible images of their favorite celebrity. These images, created through gossip, news, prints, caricatures, portraits, figurines, coins, performances, and reviews, either conformed or failed to conform to audience's notions regarding the performer's gender, class, ethnicity, political affiliation, and nationality. When actors and actresses knowingly or unknowingly disrupted audiences' expectations, they risked not only being seen as models of illegitimate or unacceptable behavior, but they also jeopardized their very celebrity.

While such disruptions proved to be a gamble for many celebrities, some discovered lasting fame in rewriting and revising public discourses and offering alternatives to accepted narratives. For a time, Dorothy Jordan succeeded in controlling her public image through the guise of the "natural" woman, a figure that while not necessarily congruent with her status as an actress, did fulfill audience's expectations of her as a woman and mother. When that image of her as a "natural" woman was ruptured by her affair with the Duke of Clarence, Jordan lost control of her tightly manufactured

celebrity image, and found her persona re-created in the new, illegitimate images of caricaturists. William Henry West Betty, conversely, was able to capitalize both fiscally and professionally on the audience's attraction to his illegitimate body. In fact, his ultimate failure was his inability to maintain his ambiguously gendered body, becoming too "normal" for his audience's attractions. Like Betty, Edmund Kean capitalized on his reputation as the early nineteenth century's premier bad boy and disrupted the paradigm of the gentlemanly performer of his peers and predecessors. While this strategy often made him an outcast in the London theatrical world, Kean's attempt to revise narratives of legitimate ethnicity and nationality did garner him lasting fame. Finally, like Jordan before her, Mrs. Margaret Bunn failed to achieve any lasting celebrity precisely because of the same type of rivalries that helped Kean to secure his celebrity status. The perception of her as a jealous, manipulative woman disrupted audience's ideas about women as helpless victims of the patriarchy, a status largely reinforced by their favorite gothic dramas. Her associations with rivals, tyrants, and madwomen further propelled her into the realm of the illegitimate other, and without a cohesive marketing strategy to deflect such claims, Mrs. Bunn faded into the chapters of the "other, minor, and lesser actresses."

For audiences in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, performers like Jordan, West, Kean, and Bunn became both physical and metaphorical sites where questions of gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality were written, challenged, and revised. While individual performers were attempting to manipulate and control their public images, the British public was also invested in consuming a certain idea about celebrity that was either congruent or incongruent with their own expectations about

celebrity behavior. For instance, an actors' or actress' performance of national identity—Jordan, Betty, and Kean were Irish while Bunn was Scottish—was particularly important at a time when questions of Britishness and national identity are being defined and redefined. For audiences, a performer's appearance of English, un-English, British, Irish or Scottish both on stage and off became a way of understanding, describing, and cataloging otherness along national lines and undercutting its potential subversiveness. For Jordan, Betty, Kean, and Bunn, illegitimacy was also linked to the body or the idea that the body becomes the locus for understanding otherness in terms of gender, age, stature, among others. In the case of Jordan and Bunn, audiences used the performer's body as a surrogate for their own understanding about acceptable and unacceptable behavior for women. For Betty and Kean, their bodies functioned as repositories where audiences could “play out” unacceptable behaviors while maintaining a safe distance. In this way, illegitimacy became a way of undermining potentially threatening ideas about the body and the body's agency.

We can also see illegitimacy linked to schools of performance, “classical” versus “natural,” which were in turn often linked to education, training, and class. All of the performers studied here were informally linked to what was colloquially referred to as the “natural” school of acting. This “school,” characterized by its physicality, passion, and informality, was most closely linked to working class performers who were also usually Irish or Scottish. Lacking the training of the “classical” school, their affiliation with this performance style functioned as a way for the British public to code them with a certain working-class identity. The illegitimacy of this performance style, therefore, was a way to mark these performances and performers as others and to question their agency.

Finally, the concept of illegitimacy stretched beyond individual performers into the culture at large. Popular or lowbrow forms of artistic expression, specifically caricature, were viewed as the inherent opposite of the more legitimate artistic forms such as engravings, etchings, and portraiture. For performers like Betty and Kean, such negative artistic publicity only fueled the passions of their admirers and furthered their celebrity reputations. For others, like Jordan and Bunn, these representations only served to further associate them with what audiences viewed as their scandalous relationships. Such illegitimate representation forces audiences to read performances and performers as symbols of otherness and undercuts the inherent agency of a celebrity figure.

The study of illegitimate celebrity not only reveals the importance of celebrity figures in larger social discourses regarding gender, class, and nationality, but also provides an important history for modern narratives regarding the role of celebrity in society. The femme fatale, the bad boy, the child star, and the wanna-be have become common and accepted figures in discussions about contemporary celebrities. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, actors and actresses who challenged acceptable strategies for celebrity behavior were often punished by exile, debt, disgrace, and humiliation. Some performers even faced a veritable textual and historical oblivion. While modern public expectations of celebrity figures may allow for a broader range of acceptable behavior, even contemporary celebrities struggle like their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century counterparts to define and redefine themselves according to strict social codes that dictate their behavior both onstage and off. Both then as now, the public seems always waiting to either reward or punish the celebrity who defies their expectations.

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